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ATARI

STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC P34

A new hope for the RPG genre?
Find out with our exclusive playtest of the
game that has the whole galaxy talking

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STAR WARS P62 JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

World Exclusive
review of this stunning
Star Wars shooter



The Drunken Master

Britain has a drinking problem – it's almost impossible to find anyone willing to sell you one after 11pm. The answer? Stock up before you go to the pub and then carry on

at home, while playing games with your mates. It's something we've probably all done at one point or another and it's without doubt that a few pints can fill you with the notion that you are the master of any game your mates want to challenge you at. But how does this arrogance equate to real-life performance? That was the question of the month as we agreed to shed our dignity (for the fourth time that week) in the name of scientifically proving whether donning the cider visor makes you better at games. The merriment starts on page 28, but I'll warn you now, it's not pretty, especially for ZONE newbies Paul Presley and Will Porter.

Elsewhere, the two giants in the FPS world dominated the news despite the fact that neither of them had anything to say for themselves. A spokesperson for VU Games stunned the world when he announced that *Half-Life 2* was going to be delayed but the developers hit back with bemusement claiming they weren't entirely sure what the bloke was on about. Perhaps he'd been drinking. The original release date is back on (for now).

We were also expecting new screenshots for *Doom 3* but nothing materialised. The next big milestone for the game is at QuakeCon where the four-player deathmatch will be unveiled, although that's still going to leave the world wondering how the single-player game (ie the reason everyone's going to buy the game) will turn out.

Thankfully though, one major-hitter did show its face this month. *Jedi Knight 3* aka *Jedi Academy* arrived in the office this month and after recovering from the drinking feature I spent the rest of the month getting drunk on Force powers and generally abusing my position as a Jedi. It's a dirty job but someone's got to do it.

Dave Woods

Dave Woods
Editor



COVER DISKS P132 →

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FIRST LOOK

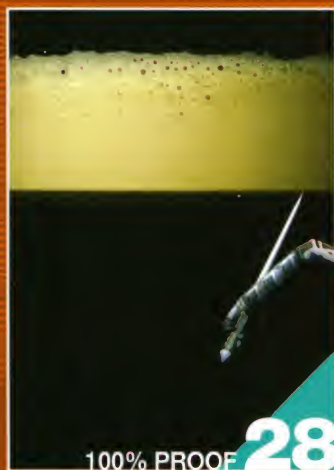
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STANDALONE EXPANSION PACK FOR
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On sale Thursday September 19. Don't miss it!

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WIN! **TINY COMPO** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (133), PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing Date: September 19, 2003. The winner of our August cover (131) is Ross Ingham of Lancashire, who knew that Max Payne had 'nothing' to lose in the original game. Well done.

HOMEWORLD2

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PC
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Sequel to 1999's Game of the Year
RELEASE DATE: 26th September 2003

www.homeworld2.com

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**FIRST
Look!**

Sixties Slaughter

CONTRACT JACK



Kill for financial gain in the latest addition to the *No One Lives Forever* series

NEFARIOUS VILLAIN Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE November
WEBSITE www.vugames.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A standalone mission pack for *No One Lives Forever 2*
- You play as new character Jack, instead of Cate Archer
- More destruction, less stealth
- Comes with *NOLF* mod-making tools

"To help him in his mission Jack has a range of weapons that would make even Q blush"



SOME PEOPLE like playing games as girls; especially girls with cut-glass British accents, seductive smiles and breasts you could rest your drink on. So you can imagine the uproar when Monolith announced that a standalone expansion pack for tongue-in-cheek shooter *No One Lives Forever 2* would no longer feature Cate Archer, but a big, gruff, burly man: one Contract JACK. However, from these early screenshots, which are for your eyes only, you can see that the next instalment in the secret agent FPS franchise could be solid gold(finger).

Jack, 'Just Another Contract Killer', is an agent of the moustache-twirling criminal organisation known as HARM, hired to deal out death to a rival Italian crime network, Danger Danger. The high-voltage head of this organisation, meanwhile, is none other than Jack's nemesis, the nefarious Ill Pazzo. We first meet Jack in a decidedly sticky situation (headed towards the sun in an out-of-control spaceship) and the game proceeds to play itself out in flashback, documenting the events that lead up to the beginning of *NOLF2*.

SPACE IS THE PLACE

Several recognisable *No One Lives Forever* locations will be revisited, most prominently a part of the space station destroyed in *NOLF1* that has somehow become lodged in the moon. Cate Archer will apparently have a brief cameo in proceedings, while chief HARM wrong-doer Dmitrij Volkov features heavily.

Contract JACK may look very similar to *NOLF2*, but emphasis has



Contract JACK has been tweaked to make destruction the order of the day.

been switched from sneaking past obstacles and enemies to running amok and making things explode. To help him in this mission Jack has a range of weapons that would make even Q blush. These include the sci-fi Cyclone Laser Rifle, a scary-sounding Bacalov Corrector and a fair number of satchels crammed with explosive C4.

Jack will journey through various different settings in the adventure including the Czech Republic, Italy, a huge underground base and the *Moonraker*-esque space station – all set to be sprayed liberally with bullets and laser beams. All the first-person shooter stalwarts will be present, but most of these seem to have been given the trademark *NOLF*-twist: prime contender for the coolest FPS

vehicle of recent years being a Vespa with a mounted machine gun.

THE MOD SQUAD

Also brand new for *Contract JACK* is a complete collection of mod-making tools that will allow you to create your own unique *NOLF* missions and maps. Plus there'll be another stonking line-up of multiplayer games, including Deathmatch, Doomsday and Demolition modes.

This was the one area where *No One Lives Forever* was lacking, so *Contract JACK* should, in theory at least, be the perfect FPS package. In any case, we like the idea of playing a man with a snarl where his morals should be – even if his arse isn't half as nice as Cate Archer's. **EW**



Forget banana skins – Jack prefers the direct approach.



The only good helicopter is one that's out of control and on fire.



The astronauts on the International Space Station settle their differences after a heated game of charades.

KITSCH

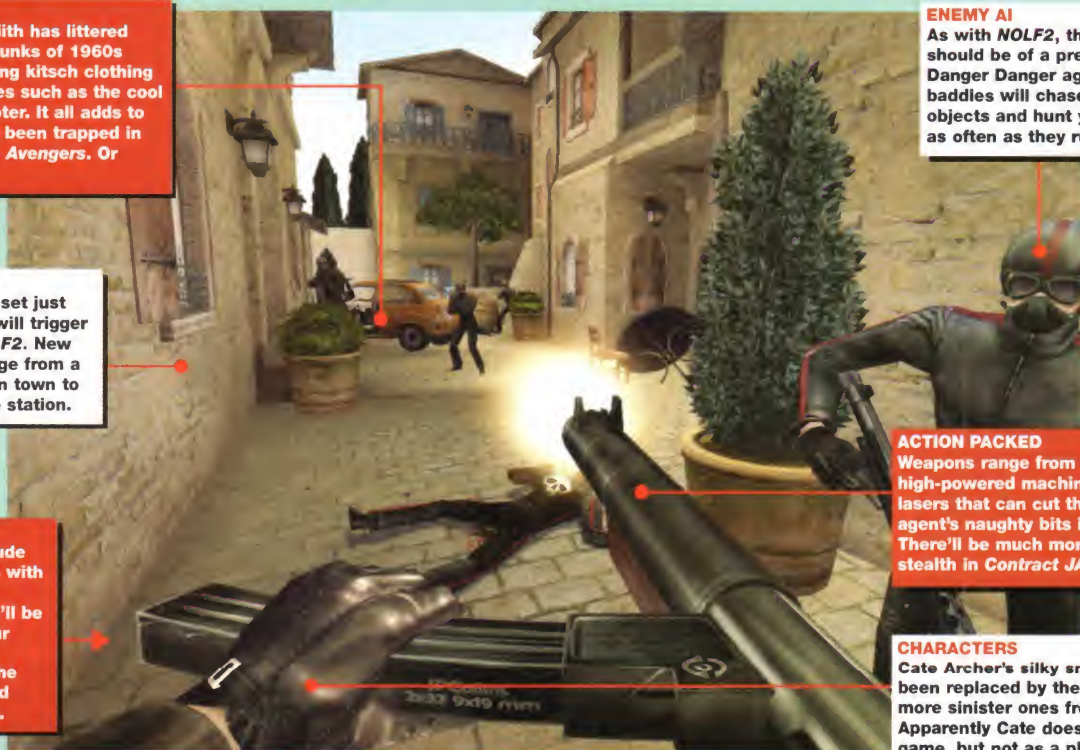
Once again Monolith has littered the levels with chunks of 1960s ambience, including kitsch clothing and period vehicles such as the cool Italian Vespa scooter. It all adds to the feeling you've been trapped in an episode of *The Avengers*. Or *Austin Powers*.

SCENERY

Contract JACK is set just after *NOLF1* and will trigger the events in *NOLF2*. New environments range from a picturesque Italian town to a high-tech space station.

MOD MAGIC

Monolith will include mod-making tools with this standalone expansion, so you'll be able to create your own home-made scenarios set in the *NOLF* universe and swap them online.



ENEMY AI

As with *NOLF2*, the enemy AI should be of a pretty high standard. Danger Danger agents and other baddies will chase you, hide behind objects and hunt you down in teams as often as they run away.

ACTION PACKED

Weapons range from C4 explosives and high-powered machine-guns to lethal lasers that can cut through an enemy agent's naughty bits in seconds. There'll be much more action than stealth in *Contract JACK*.

CHARACTERS

Cate Archer's silky smooth mitts have been replaced by these altogether more sinister ones from Jack. Apparently Cate does feature in the game, but not as a playable character.



ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN



FULL TILT

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ I have a confession to make: I love pinball simulations. Yep, sadly, ever since the early days of the superb *Pinball Dreams* on the Commodore Amiga, I've been searching for the ultimate flipper-flickin' experience. Now I believe my quest for the pinball Holy Grail is finally at an end.

No, it's not *Pure Pinball* (reviewed on page 82), which although isn't too bad, doesn't compare to my latest obsession. Pinball emulation on the PC. Regular readers of *Bulletin* will know about our excellent Emulation Zone guides to recreating the classic games of yesteryear, and this is where, when leafing through issue 111, I discovered Stuart Campbell's excellent piece on the burgeoning pinball emulation community.

So, after downloading Visual Pinball and Visual PinMame from the Interweb, I can now play perfect versions of my three favourite tables – *Star Wars*, *The Addams Family* and *The Twilight Zone*. I've even managed to introduce Woods, Hill and other ZONE team members to pinball's visceral delights, with the office now often filled with the sounds of flipper clicks, zaps, poings and eye-watering swear words.

However, I've also been lucky enough this month to get an exclusive hands-on play of the stunning WWII FPS *Call Of Duty*, which could well steal the PC shooter crown from *Medal Of Honor* – check out the exclusive new shots on this page. We also have info on the new *Legacy Of Kain* game (page 15), a report on the successful Scottish games industry (page 16), brand new screens from the amazing *Rome: Total War* (page 21) plus regulars The Man Who Knows and Emulation Zone. Enjoy.

DUTY BOOTY

EXCLUSIVE! NEW SCREENSHOTS AND HANDS-ON PLAY OF INFINITY WARD'S POTENTIAL MEDAL OF HONOR-BEATER, CALL OF DUTY



Call Of Duty uses a heavily re-written *Wolfenstein* engine.



Take out anti-air defences in the Nazi hinterland.

PC ZONE FIRST brought *Call Of Duty* to the world's attention back in issue 129, followed by a major preview the next month. Why did we choose to slap a virtually unknown game on the cover? Because here at *Zone* we feel it's our job to not only feature the *Doom III*s and *Half-Life 2*s of this world, but also to champion new games that we feel you'll be soon gnawing at your mouse mat to play.

Several months on, and the buzz about WWII first-person shooter *Call Of Duty* is building faster and faster as we approach the October launch date. We recently met up again with the refreshingly down-to-earth team from Infinity Ward for an exclusive play of the latest build of their game, including levels that have never been shown – until now.

DUTY CALLS

Although Infinity Ward was formed by 22 members of the original *Medal Of Honor* team – including several project leads –

chief creative officer Vince Sampaella is keen to distance his company's game from EA's series. "When we started *CoD* we sat down with a blank slate. We wanted to make a WWII game, so we put everything that we could into it to make it ours. We didn't do it based on another game – this is our own vision." Unlike *MoH*, *Call Of Duty* doesn't focus on one super-soldier throughout its single-player campaign, instead choosing to put the player in the boots of characters from the American, British and Russian armies, each often backed up by AI-controlled squads, proving that the USA didn't win the war alone, after all.

One of the British missions revealed to us for the first time was set around a heavily-defended German dam. As a member of an elite commando squad, you have to sneak in and destroy any air defences so the heroic dambuster bomber squadron can attack. The first half of the level involves some stealthy sniper work as you make your way across the top of the

dam, blowing up anti-aircraft guns. However, as you enter the bowels of the complex and the alarm is sounded, the pace increases as the mission becomes a machine-gun free-for-all with intense shoot-outs in Nazi-packed corridors.

PANZER MOVEMENT

Another new *Call Of Duty* level we had an opportunity to play was a superb Russian tank campaign in war-ravaged Poland. The tanks are operated by using the mouse to control the turret and fire the gun, with the keyboard controlling the tracks. It's tricky at first, but after a few minutes we were steaming along with our Commie tank squadron, blasting huge chunks out of buildings, obliterating Nazi Panthers and Tigers, and pounding shells into machine-gun nests. Another tank mission had our metal beasts in open snow-covered fields enjoying a hectic battle involving formations of armoured vehicles, crushing trees under their powerful tracks and raining down extreme death on enemy positions.

It's pulse-quickening stuff and part of Infinity Ward's aim to deliver a shooter full of many unique war experiences, from epic set-pieces involving your character fighting alongside hundreds of troops storming Stalingrad, to stealth missions where it's just you and your trusty sniper rifle against the enemy. We'll have a bigger hands-on preview of the ever-more-impressive *Call Of Duty* next month when we'll reveal multiplayer options, new single-player missions and more exclusive screenshots.



Your tank is armed with a cannon and a front-facing machine-gunner.

■ Publisher: Activision
 ■ Developer: Infinity Ward
 ■ ETA: October
 ■ Website: www.infinityward.com



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HALF-LIFE 2 DELAY?

WILL VALVE'S SCI-FI SUPER-SEQUEL LAND ON SEPTEMBER 30TH?



We were told to expect *Half-Life 2* in September...



...now there are rumours of a Christmas release...



...in any case, we'll keep the home fires burning.

STRANGE THINGS have been happening in Gordon Freeman's world – and were not talking about the G-Man's machinations. Reports from publisher VU Games of a delay to Freeman's latest vehicle, sci-fi first-person shooter *Half-Life 2*, were soon quashed when the company's PR director Amy Farris

was quoted as saying, "Valve is still working towards a September 30 release date."

Meanwhile, Valve itself has consistently denied that *Half-Life 2* will slip into the Christmas period, sticking to the date it announced in May after five years of keeping schtum. However,

if the game is to be released at the end of September as planned, Valve is leaving promotion of the game very late, only providing movies of *Half-Life 2* that were shown at E3 in May, and resolutely refusing to issue preview code, new screenshots or information. After knocking on Valve's door

constantly for several weeks, **PC ZONE** has been assured we'll have exciting news next month. Stay tuned...

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Valve
- ETA: September 30
- Website: www.valvesoftware.com

PC ZONE WANTS YOU!

JOB VACANCY: DISC EDITOR

DO YOU WANT to work for the best games magazine in the world? We're on the lookout for someone with a massive thirst for PC games, good people skills and the ability to compile and organise the most game-packed and varied coverdiscs each and every month.

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- Write clear and concise copy for the magazine
- Network and build up a highly polished industry contact list
- Test game demos to ensure they work on a variety of systems

Formal qualifications to degree level, along with experience in Excel would be beneficial but not essential. Education to A-Level standard is a requirement. You must also be enthusiastic, know your PC games inside out, have a friendly telephone manner, strong communication skills and be able to work under pressure as part of a small team.

If this sounds like a dream come true, send your CV complete with covering letter (stating current salary if applicable) and a short 200 word review on your favourite current PC game to Dave Woods, **PC ZONE**, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland St, London, W1T 4JD or by email to editor@pczone.co.uk. The closing date for applications is Wednesday Sept 3.



The Mane Event

EXCLUSIVE! LATEST VISUALS FROM REFLEXIVE'S RPG *LIONHEART: LEGEND OF THE CRUSADER*



Characters can master over 60 spells.

REFLEXIVE ENTERTAINMENT has released new screenshots from its forthcoming medieval role-playing game *Lionheart: Legend Of The Crusader*. Previously responsible for the decent *Star Trek: Away Team*, Reflexive is crafting a title set in 1588AD, when a cataclysm known as the Disjunction has destroyed towns and cities and unleashed hordes of hellish monsters. In this alternative reality, the mythical witches and beasts



Lionheart has over 100 monster types to battle.

that people used to fear actually exist, and have to be fought in secret to avoid the wrath of the vicious ministers of the sinister religious Inquisition.

Lionheart uses a character development system known as SPECIAL, that was used in the *Fallout* RPG series, and is basically an acronym for a player's characteristics – Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility and Luck. You can team up with other stragglers you meet along the way, or even summon magical creatures to aid your quest, as well as call upon over 60 unique spells. We'll have more on *Lionheart: Legend Of The Crusader* soon.

- Publisher: Avalon
- Developer: Reflexive Entertainment
- ETA: October
- Website: www.reflexive.net

"In this alternative reality, the mythical witches and beasts that people used to fear actually exist"



PCZONE 13

SHORTS

DIVINITY
UNIVERSE RIFT

Currently being thrown together by Larian Studios is a new 3D RPG set in the Divine Divinity universe. *Riftrunner* is built on the Divinity engine and will feature a brand new storyline, an unlimited character development system and a combat system that introduces rucks between all members of your party. We'll have a bigger preview of *Riftrunner* before the game's launch later this year – check out www.larian.com for updates.

WARTHOG OF
THE RINGS?

UK-based developer Warthog is believed to be working on a brand new *Lord Of The Rings* RPG for VU Games. Rumoured to be known as "Shadows Of Mordor", the game is being coded by the company's Texas studios (formerly Fever Pitch) and will apparently give you the freedom to have a darker Sauron-influenced character. Don't expect a release until Q1 2005 at the earliest.

WAR OF THE
WORLDS

Publisher Cenega is due to release two new PC games this autumn. First up will be Altair Interactive's *UFO: Aftermath*, a 3D isometric RTS in the mould of the classic *X-Com*, and will be released in September. Secondly, Plastic Reality's Korea: *Forgotten Conflict*, due in October, is a tactical war game that sees you control a team of military specialists through accurately reconstructed environments from the Korean War.

GHOST MASTER
WINNERS

Congratulations to the following ten winners of the *Ghost Master* compo from issue #131, who each receive a copy of *Empire's* excellent spooky strategy game and an ectoplasm-coated T-shirt: Adam Raphael, Edinburgh; Mrs D Birks, Pontefract; Richard Walker, Whitby; Jackie O'Neill, Brentford; Harry Taggart, Kilwinning; Alex Cawley, Barrow Haven; Gaven Reith, Ayr; Robert Lowry, Seaton; Kevin Greathead, Doncaster; Miss T Dawson, Portsmouth.

BACK TO IRAQ

SCI PREPARES TO SHIP CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II

LAST YEAR'S TACTICAL shooter *Conflict: Desert Storm* was a half-decent attempt to fill the gulf (sorry) between the rock-hard action of *Rainbow Six* and more conventional arcade shooters. While it didn't exactly blow our socks off, its heart was in the right place, and we're now looking forward to the bigger, better sequel, currently getting a final spit and polish at UK-based Pivotal.

Desert Storm II will once again take you back to 1991, putting you in command of a hardened squad of soldiers deep in Saddam's territory. You can split your squad into fire teams, give them angles to cover and

movement orders, as well as taking command of any one of them for a firsthand taste of the action.

This time round, the AI has been completely revamped, utilising accurate sound and vision cones that take into account shadows and partial cover. The environments are bigger and more detailed, and to make you work that bit harder, you now have to get all four men safely to the end of each level to succeed. We'll have the full review next issue.



■ Publisher: SCI
■ Developer: Pivotal
■ ETA: September
■ Website: www.sci.co.uk/games



Conflict: Desert Storm II has authentic desert vehicles to ride in.

"Nope, still no WMDs..."

Going Underground

EA'S NEED FOR SPEED IS REINVENTED IN THE CITY AT NIGHT



Motion blur or crap screenshot? You decide.



Real men drive red cars.

OVER THE YEARS, the *Need For Speed* series has been up and down like a whore's drawers. The franchise continues apace though, and the next version looks to be the biggest departure yet. Gone are the rural police chases, and in come gritty urban settings, with races taking place in the city at night,

eerily aping the concept of Rockstar's *Midnight Club* series.

The cars in *Need For Speed Underground* will at least be real though, with Mitsubishi, Subaru and Toyota working for the EA dollar. Customisation will also play a key role, with a host of licensed parts available

to upgrade your motor. Throw in high-speed drag races and online support, and this could be every boy racer's dream.

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts
■ Developer: EA Black Box
■ ETA: Early 2004
■ Website: www.needforspeed.com



The Reaver's Return

KAIN AND RAZIEL VAMP IT UP IN *LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE*

THE LATEST instalment in the *Legacy Of Kain* series is being trumpeted by developer Crystal Dynamics. *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* will see the land of Nosgoth threatened by the Hylden, a race so evil that arch-rivals Kain and Raziel (who was last seen waving a big sword in *Soul Reaver*) uniting and fighting together.

Taking on the role of both Kain and Raziel in alternate chapters, *Defiance* looks set to continue the blood-sucking and soul-devouring traits of its predecessors but will also up the action quota quite considerably. The combat system has been rejigged, with project director Amy Hennig promising "over-the-top attacks and combos, intuitive controls and visceral finishing moves", so expect plenty of blood and gore.

Most exciting of all though is a new telekinesis feature that you will use to manipulate the environment around you; hurling your enemies against walls, over ledges or into conveniently placed spikes. We'll have a hands-on preview soon.

■ **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive
 ■ **Developer:** Crystal Dynamics
 ■ **ETA:** Q4 2003
 ■ **Website:** www.eidos.com



Stop Press! Crystal Dynamics will also be developing the next *Tomb Raider*.



Play as Kain and Raziel in *Defiance*.



"Shazam!"



"Football is a team game. The thing that really strikes you is that this is really about 12 individuals working collectively as one team."

FIFA 2004 franchise producer Bill Harrison solves the problem of how David Beckham will slot into the Real Madrid side. And who said Canadians knew nothing about football?

"This is a sign from the government that they have realised there is a very strong potential for the games industry in France."

Frederic Diot, a Parisian games industry analyst commenting on the French government's plan to give 4m Euros (£2.9m) to help cash-strapped Gallic videogames companies. Does this mean we can look forward to Zorro 2?

"People like choo-choos!"

Franz J. Felsl, lead designer at Pop Top Software presents his disturbing argument about why Railroad Tycoon III will be a success.

POLISH HONOUR

CITY INTERACTIVE TAKE TO THE WWI SKIES IN *WINGS OF HONOUR*

POLAND IS KNOWN for many things – Lech Walesa, Jerzy Dudek, Borscht – and now Warsaw-based City Interactive is hoping to make an impression over here with its brand new WWI arcade flight sim *Wings Of Honour*.

Wings Of Honour has been designed to capture the seat-of-your-pants thrills of historical aerial combat, rather than making a serious attempt at simulating the rickety old biplanes of yore. Huge, open terrains to explore. Ten different types of bi- and tri-planes to zip about in. Dogfights, bomb runs, recon missions and zeppelin hunts make up the action. There are even several types of multiplayer modes to extend the war, with players able to show off with bigger, stronger and faster planes in the online arena depending on how far they've taken the single-player campaign.

Technically it's looking very accomplished with all the specular and particle effects you could wish for, while the terrains are packed with ground detail. *Wings Of Honour* is due for a September release and we'll take a more detailed look soon.



Cloud effects help to shield you.



■ **Publisher:** TBA
 ■ **Developer:** City Interactive
 ■ **ETA:** September
 ■ **Website:** www.city-interactive.com



The Red Baron even puts in an appearance.



HIGHLAND GAMES

RECKON IT'S GRIM UP NORTH? THINK AGAIN, BECAUSE SCOTLAND'S GAMES INDUSTRY IS THE ENVY OF DEVELOPERS AROUND THE UK, REPORTS PAVEL BARTER

SPECIAL REPORT

"SCOTLAND IS the new Japan", according to Brian Baglow of the Scottish Games Alliance (SGA). That isn't to say that the region's developers are creating wacky games about shaving grannies or racing giant robotic insects. In fact, Scotland's games industry is perkier than Lara Croft after a dip in a cold river and its impressive profile is catching beady eyes around the globe.

Our friends in the Far East might not be collecting their redundancy cheques just yet, but they're sure to have noticed the flurry of activity taking place north of Hadrian's Wall. The triple whammy of education, funding and good old-fashioned handshakes has created opportunities in Scotland that are denied to gaming wizards elsewhere in the UK. And there are games to prove it...

GTA: EDINBURGH

Edinburgh's Rockstar North produced two of the best selling PC games in recent years – *GTA III* and *GTA: Vice City*. Dundee's VIS Entertainment employs 200 people in four studios around the UK, and has insane cartoon beat 'em up *Tom & Jerry – Fists Of Fury* on its roster. DC Studios, from Glasgow, created the *Bratz* dance title for PC and an episodic online game for US TV show *Alias*. The fantastically titled Jack's Hoose Music was the only UK Company to work on *Enter The Matrix*, conducting industrial beats for the game's fight sequences.

Andrew McLennan, CEO of Glasgow-based Steel Monkeys, oversaw creation of *Corvette: Zero To Gone* (to be released at the end

of this year), hard-hatted brickie Bob The Builder's digital foray, and *Master Rallye*. He reckons that the strength of the industry can be traced back to DMA Design (now Rockstar North), whose svengali team created both the *Lemmings* and *Grand Theft Auto*

franchises. "They were a strong early force in development and a lot of other companies span out from them. A lot of staff learnt their trade there too. This seed bloomed into the Scottish entrepreneurial culture and has resulted in the diverse and capable developers we see today."

What remains of this company hasn't scarpered either. Ex-DMA honcho David Jones has formed a new Dundee-based studio with two other high-profile veterans of the industry: Ian Hetherington (former MD of Sony Europe and founder of Psygnosis), and Tony Harman (a former bigwig at Nintendo). Real Time Worlds is keeping quiet about its work in progress, but hints that "fans of *GTA* and next-generation racing games won't be disappointed". Jones is adamant that the company's location is an important aspect to their work. "I have always been based in Dundee, and this is where we set up DMA Design back in 1988. There are a lot of people around this area with strong development skills... It's high profile and offers us a global stage on which to perform."

A visit to the Los Angeles Convention Centre at the E3 Expo, back in May, revealed a Caledonian stronghold entrenched amid the scrum of international developers. Since the mid-1990s, different strands of Scotland's game industry have been clubbing together to collectively launch their wares on the world.

The Scottish Games Alliance, formed on



Corvette, Bratz, GTA: Vice City: Scottish games currently have a lot more investment opportunities than other UK titles.

the instigation of VIS boss Chris van der Kuyl and Scottish Enterprise, was instrumental in helping bring Scot skills to the attention of the games industry.

CASH CRISIS?

Chris van der Kuyl also fronts TIGA, the developer trade association for the whole of the UK, and actively lobbies for the country's developers. "[Finance Minister] Gordon Brown recently came to our studio as part of a general fact-finding mission on the digital media industries in Scotland.

He was impressed by the high standard of work and entrepreneurship being carried out by such a relatively young company." Among the items discussed

with the Minister was the subject of tax breaks for games developers – the lack of governmental support has been a kiss of death for many UK games companies over the years, and the occasional financial favour would be a blessing.

Keith Laslop, CEO of England-based Elixir (*Republic: The Revolution and Evil Genius*) is adamant that funding is a critical need of UK developers today, as publishers are becoming less and less willing to give money to projects from the concept stage. "A few developers – Elixir included – have been very fortunate in being able to raise outside investment," says Laslop, "but it's very difficult and may be out of reach for many UK development teams."

The Scots are luckier. Within the next three years, Scottish Enterprise is investing £25m in the country's creative industries. A scheme, Fund4Games, has been specifically designed for game developers, allowing companies to apply for venture capital of between £250,000 to £1m. "The Scots have a significant advantage in attracting funding due to the grants and subsidies available," says Jonathan Newth, managing director of Kuju, currently working on *Fire Warrior*. "There are some initiatives south of the border, but they are typically more regional initiatives and lack the coherence and completeness of Scottish Enterprise."

MD of Creative Assembly, Tim Ansell, responsible for *Medieval: Total War – Viking Invasion* and forthcoming RTS



Become a private dick in 1930s pot-boiler Gumshoe.

Rome: *Total War*, says attitudes towards the industry in the rest of the UK are slowly starting to change. "I think TIGA and the Scottish games community have contributed greatly to this. We get nothing from the UK government but in other countries their governments take this industry seriously and invest heavily to try to nurture a virtually non-existent developer base into something bigger. They'd dream of having the number of quality developers that the UK can boast."

STUDENT GAMES

When it comes to learning the ropes of game development, Scotland is also uniquely blessed. The University of

"The Scots have a significant advantage in attracting funding due to the grants and subsidies available"

Abertay was the first of its kind in the UK to offer degree courses in computer science focusing on game-based skills. Extensive placements are available in Japan, according to course lecturer Dr Louis Nantanson. Also, 80 per cent of those who graduate end up working with well-established games companies. "My personal view is that some key individuals – Dave Jones, Chris van der Kuyl among

them – have a lot to do with the high profile of our industry," says Nantanson. "With their early success, they didn't take the money and run. Instead they managed the maturation of the industry, stimulating education and convincing government of gaming's importance." Now, however, developers in the rest of the UK are getting organised.

Developers, including Argonaut and Batfish Studios, followed Scotland's lead and joined together to place a booth at this year's E3, drawing attention from hundreds of attendees and even receiving a visit from the Minister of State for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, Stephen Timms. Plus a new consortium of studios from the north of England called Game Republic has just been created by Team 17, Revolution and The Code Monkeys in order to get more capital investment.

Scotland has finally woken the government up to gaming, and perhaps it's only a matter of time before we see rival parties waging 'Unreal Tournaments' in the House of Commons. Now, there's a way of solving international disputes... [E3]



Bow to Dundee's David Jones, the man behind *Lemmings* and *GTA*.



VIS Entertainment's Chris van der Kuyl is Dundee's local hero.

CELTIC INSPIRATION

A BRAVE NEW WORLD OF GAMING FROM UP NORTH...



A new online horseracing game called *I Race* from Dundee's VIS will allow players to run a championship stable, breed a nag, enter it into races, and bet until the bottom falls out of your wallet.



Scottish developer Visual Sciences has lent its tartan talent to the official *Formula One* franchise over the past few years. Still, these games are nothing compared to driving in Edinburgh at rush hour...



The children's TV shows *Teletubbies*, *Wallace & Gromit* and *The Thunderbirds* have all been given the CD-ROM game treatment by Absolute Studios, which is a Glasgow-based company.



Edgies, from Edinburgh, have created *Las Vegas Tycoon*, *Dark Planet*, *SFK*, and a game with the greatest title of all time: *Baldies*. There's another one called *Skullcaps* on the way too. We sense a theme...



Christopher Natsume
Producer of *Far Cry* at Crytek

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing?

The competitors. Always the competitors. The office favourite by a long shot is *Battlefield*, but I'm usually working late and can't join them – they always kick my ass anyway.

What was the last game you completed?

GTA III. I have been meaning to get *Vice City*, but I know that I will lose way too much sleep, and the alpha for *Far Cry* is coming in a few weeks. I have a shrink-wrapped copy at home, I will bust it out to celebrate when the milestone is reached.

What is your favourite game of all time?

Ape Escape on PSone. Best. Controls. Ever. You don't have to think about what you are doing – you just intuitively do it. And anything with monkeys is by nature twice as good as anything without.

What's your proudest career high?

The variety of games I've worked on. I've made space fighter games, military sims, chariot racing games and platformers.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

I'm especially inspired by some of the new companies in places like Malaysia, China, and the former Soviet Union – these guys are showing a lot of the drive and ingenuity that built the Japanese and US/UK industry.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming as a whole?

Credibility. By bringing a more adult feel to the industry, the PC has really moved games from being seen as kids toys to being a respectable adult form of entertainment – even on consoles.

What is your company's philosophy?

Crytek knows no fear. We've always targeted the most difficult technology and the most competitive markets. Putting the bar really high has made us all give the best we have.

What's the best thing about your job?

The best thing is the diversity of working in a multinational European company.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Remember that really high bar I mentioned earlier...?

What's PC gaming's Next Big Thing?

Better use of networks and the Internet for co-operative action titles. It's a natural evolution to want short fixes of socially interactive games.



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EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator **Stuart Campbell**



A quiet moment in *Radiant Silvergun*.

YOU REALLY WERE THE GREATEST SIGHT

Over the history of Emulation Zone, we've teased you with glimpses of one of the few remaining Holy Grails of console emulation, the Sega Saturn. During its short life, the ill-fated machine played host to some legendary games that didn't appear on any other format – most famously Treasure's genre-defining shoot 'em up *Radiant Silvergun*. A variety of emulators have attempted to tackle the complicated



architecture of Sega's machine, with varying limited success. Until quite recently the best effort was Satourne, a French emulator requiring degrees in both rocket science and brain surgery to operate, and with results that didn't really justify the trouble.

However, in a development that's a first as far as Emu Zone can recall, the

commercial games industry was a step ahead of the bedroom emulators. In 2002, Sega of Japan announced a commercial Saturn emulator, running Saturn games via an online rental network, which turned out to be based on some unreleased code by a mystery programmer. The official emu never made it out of Japan, so Western enthusiasts were left out in the cold, until earlier this year when a program called *Giri Giri* appeared. Rumours, which have never been completely cleared up one way or the other, variously suggest that *Giri Giri* is either a hacked and translated version of the official emulator, or a leaked version direct from the coder, or something entirely separate that just magically appeared not long after the official prog (for this reason we can't direct you to a homepage, just in case), but the only thing emulation fans cared about was that finally, a working, widely-compatible Saturn emulator for the PC could be downloaded and played.

Even by high-end emu standards, *Giri Giri* needs a lot of processing power. You'll need a fast PC and a pretty top-end graphics card to get max performance out of it. Emu Zone's Athlon 2000XP and cheapo GeForce4 MX440 didn't have quite the heft to pull off *Radiant Silvergun* at full speed with sound, though most games are fast enough to be eminently playable, also a

truly harrowing soundcard transplant was required. And depending on your operating system (it doesn't like Win XP much) you may have to "rip" your original Saturn CDs down to ISO files before the emulator will play them. This, of course, also gives rise to industry worries about illegal distribution of the ISO files, though at 100MB-500MB for one game

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The

games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) which you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give them to the emulators themselves.

“Giri Giri is either a hacked and translated version of the official emulator, or a leaked version from the coder...”

it's not going to be a mainstream piracy worry for some time.

But anyhow, *Giri Giri* is a tremendous piece of coding, and one that clearly demonstrates that perfect Saturn emulation is something that will be with the masses sooner rather than later. For now, especially if you have a ninja machine, enjoy something very close.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

SPACE INSTIGATORS (ATARI VCS)



Check the new hi-res VCS graphics!

One of the worst things about the ever-shortening life cycle of games consoles (the gap between hardware generations now is barely half of what it was 20 years ago) is that coders never get the chance to push machines to their limits. Back in 1980, Atari's VCS conversion of *Space Invaders* was a triumph that almost single-handedly saved the VCS from a premature grave, but hardcore arcade-goers lamented the lack of

anything other than the most passing resemblance to the titanic coin-op whose name it shared. Of course, everyone assumed that was simply the best the primitive hardware could be expected to do, but some dedicated amateurs recently set out to prove that the VCS was capable of something a lot better, and the result was *Space Invaders*. Dragging new levels of performance out of the veteran machine, it leaves you to wonder just where we might be now if programmers could be arsed to learn how to code the hardware they have, instead of simply getting the player to spend a fortune on expensive new gear every six months. Well, it makes Emu Zone wonder, anyway.

LINKS

www.atariage.com – Atari Age homepage

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

THE FUTURE OF TAKE TWO

Interactive has been thrown into turmoil following a massive **ten million dollar** lawsuit from a man who claims the publisher stole his life. The unprecedented action comes from erstwhile professional wrestler **Maxx Payne**, who claims that Take Two appropriated his name for **Max Payne**. Payne, real name **Daryl Peterson**, wept: "I left wrestling to come home to **Utah** and be with my family, and I find myself in the biggest **battle** of my life – to save my **identity**. They stole something from me that I'm not going to give up."

Peterson claims to have introduced the Payne persona in **1988** and has also laboured under the monickers **Maximum Payne**, **Max Pain** and **Lucifer Payne**. Of his creation, Peterson insisted: "This wasn't a casual thought process. It was a way to develop the Maxx Payne persona." Peterson claims his livelihood – voiceovers, commercials, **bit parts** – is at stake, and bleated: "I plan to direct films as Maxx Payne." Peterson's lawyer, **Blake Atkins**, slammed Take Two, berating: "They have not paid him anything to use his persona. They've thrown down the gauntlet. They don't care about Maxx Payne as a human being." Take Two has yet to break its silence, particularly over **why** this story has come to light **four years** after the original game was released and mere **months** before the hotly-anticipated sequel.

Footage from controversial **murder** simulator **Postal 2** is clearly visible in a pop music video starring **adolescent** masturbatory fantasy figure **Justin Timberlake**. The single, *Where Is The Love* by Canadian hip-hop no-marks **Black Eyed Peas** stars the inexplicably popular warbler, and the video features a brace of PC gamers carrying out **unspeakable** acts of violence while Timberlake obliviously croons the **hapless** tune. **Vince 'Rent-a-quote' Desi** of developer **Running With Scissors**, boasted: "It may seem a little unusual to *Postal*'s legions of fans to see actual gameplay footage from their beloved hit PC game in a hip-hop video about love. But the star of the game, the **Postal Dude**, is well known for spreading his love in some unusual ways." As, allegedly, is Timberlake.

"The star of *Postal*, is well known for spreading his love in some unusual ways." As, allegedly, is Timberlake"

Still Dangerous

ILLUSION SOFTWARES LIFTS THE SMOKESCREEN ON *HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2*'S MULTIPLAYER MODES



Occupation mode sees teams fighting over territory.

Skirmish is a new tactical multiplayer mode.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS was one of the best 3D action/strategy games of all time, so we're understandably damp with excitement at the thought of a forthcoming sequel. To check on the game's progress, we recently chatted to Lukas Kure, executive producer from Illusion Softworks about the multiplayer modes in *H&D2*.

"We've mainly been focusing on the Deathmatch, Occupation and Skirmish multiplayer modes," said Kure. "However, there will be opportunities for gamers to enjoy co-op missions too. Plus, we're now planning to release a mission disc after *H&D2* launches, which will allow gamers to play through all of the single-player missions co-operatively in multiplayer."

Skirmish (working title) is a completely new tactical multiplayer game played over a series of rounds, with no respawn option. Basically, one team tries to

complete their set of objectives, while the opposing team tries to sabotage their efforts. *Hidden & Dangerous 2* will also have a heap of new weapons and more vehicles, including mini-submarines, SAS jeeps and tanks – all of which use the excellent driving model from the company's recent gangster FPS *Mafia*.

"As for the AI, enemies will work in groups when attacking, and will set various traps to defend themselves. By the same token, they will also surrender if completely out-numbered with very little chance of survival," continued Kure. We'll have more on *Hidden & Dangerous 2* next month.

- Publisher: Gathering
- Developer: Illusion Softworks
- ETA: Q4 2003
- Website: www.hidden-and-dangerous.com

RULE THE WORLD

SID MEIER UNVEILS *CIV III* EXPANSION *CONQUESTS*

SID MEIER'S LATEST PC project – an expansion to *Civilization III* – is on its way this autumn, and PC ZONE has snatched an exclusive interview with the legendary world-builder. "*Conquests* is a great addition to *Civ III* because it allows fans to experience *Civilization* in a more realistic historical context," Meier told us. "We've recreated some of the most exciting and critical moments in history, beginning with Mesopotamia and leading up to WWII."

Each of the nine fast-paced campaigns includes brand new tech trees, civilisations, map features, wonders and units. "You'll find, for example, volcanoes, rain forests and special abilities like stealth attack and ritual sacrifice in the Mesoamerica Conquest, and the Enkidu Warrior and the Three-Man Chariot in the Mesopotamia Conquest."

Meier is particularly pleased with the Sengoku: Sword Of The Shogun conquest: "It's set in feudal Japan, a fascinating time. You'll race to discover gunpowder and firearms but you will also negotiate with the other clans in your efforts to be appointed Shogun.



The world's major conflicts are recreated.

It provides an exciting blend of technological advancement, combat, and diplomacy."

In addition to the campaigns, *Conquests* has seven new civilisations, such as the Mayans, plus two new difficulty levels ('DemiGod' and 'Sid') which can be played in the main game. Plus there will be chances to employ

different strategies and enjoy new victory conditions in multiplayer. We'll hopefully have an in-depth thrash of *Civilization III: Conquests* next issue.

- Publisher: Atari
- Developer: Firaxis
- ETA: October
- Website: www.firaxis.com

ROMAN HOLIDAY

EXCLUSIVE! THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY SHOWS THE LATEST CODE OF ALL-CONQUERING 3D RTS *ROME: TOTAL WAR*

THE STUNNING *Total War* series continues to gain momentum, with expectations for *Rome: Total War* higher than your average university student. And rightly so. Having recently caught up with the chaps at The Creative Assembly, we were treated to an eye-popping demonstration showing off some titanic siege battles. City walls were battered down by trebuchets as defenders lined the walls and futilely rained down arrows on their invaders, who were hidden under a wall of shields. With each of the 3,000 troops on the battlefield individually modelled in 3D, *Rome* is without a single doubt the best-looking RTS we've ever seen.

We then saw another battle where elephant-mounted Greek forces scythed through a Roman garrison, the creatures butting soldiers with their tusks and

sending them arching through the air like rag-dolls. In a later demonstration, a barbarian rabble let loose 30 rabid dogs on their Roman foes, which clawed viciously as the well organised yet clearly frightened army battled to remain in formation. The team also promised that more animals would feature, including Incendiary Pigs, which can be covered in tar, set on fire and let loose on the enemy. Genius.

From the demonstration we can say without a doubt that *Rome: Total War* will change the face of strategy gaming forever, although we'll have to wait until 2004 before the game ships. More soon.

Publisher: Activision
Developer: The Creative Assembly
ETA: Early 2004
Website: www.totalwar.com



3,000 troops with this detail - wow!



Watch out for concealed enemies in the long grass.



No current RTS is looking anywhere near as good.

Jumpers for Goalposts

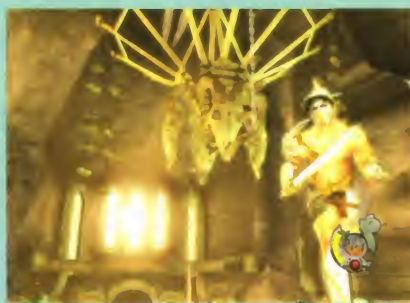
URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER HEADS UP ACCLAIM'S NEW PC RELEASES



UFS - gangsta footie.



Alias - girl power.



Gladiator: SoV - hack 'n' slashery.

ACCLAIM IS RETURNING to grass roots football for the first of the company's new PC game launches this autumn. Developed by Silicon Dreams, *Urban Freestyle Soccer* is an Adidas-branded arcade-style footie game, where teams made up of four players compete in various 'street' settings. You can create your own squad of stars from more than 50 players, each of whom has their own catchphrases, tricks and combos - think along the lines of the recent Ronaldinho Nike ad and you've got the idea. *UFS* has single-player

competitions, training and mini-games, but you can also compete in multiplayer LAN games with up to four players.

Also set for release later this year is *Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance* and *Alias*. *Gladiator: SoV* is a third-person action-adventure that takes place in a mythical Roman Empire. As a burly Russell Crowe-wannabe, you can arm yourself with both conventional and magical weaponry to brutally assault undead skeletal hordes and other mythical creatures in temples, labyrinths and open landscapes.

Alias, meanwhile, is a stealth-action game based on the exploits of the über-babe Jennifer Garner in the cult TV series, and features motion-captured moves for brutal hand-to-hand combat as well as the use of lethal weaponry. The first of the three titles will be released in September - more soon.

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Silicon Dreams (*UFS*), Acclaim (*Gladiator, Alias*)
ETA: Early 2004
Website: www.acclaim.com

Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy. The *Star Wars* game you've always wanted.



Pinball emulation. Play *The Twilight Zone*, *The Addams Family* and *Star Wars* tables any time you like. Check out www.vpforums.com for info.

Boy wonder Will Porter 'down wid da kidz' on Sky TV's *Gamezville*.

Rebellion already providing us with stunning hi-res cover art for next issue's *Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death* exclusive review and playable demo. See? It's not hard, LucasArts. (see *Bad Cop* below)

BAD COP



LucasArts' marvellous act of vetoing every piece of *Jedi Academy* cover art on the day of our mag's deadline. It's enough to turn you to the dark side.

The hangovers from our drinking games feature - see page 28.

PC ZONE losing the mag's budget for the next six months at the roulette wheel - see page 90.

Possible *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2* delays. Valve and id - SORT IT OUT!

Good Cop (*Ironside*), Bad Cop (*TJ Hooker*) (from their respective TV shows of the same name) - suggested by Mrs M. Bird, Bristol. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop/Bad Cop to win a PC Zone goodie-bag!

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it



ChartTrack

TOP 10



Yet again *The Sims* franchise sits in the top spot, smoking a big cigar and looking happy with itself. Having beaten off the competition for three whole months, it seems that only a direct military strike will be able to dislodge it.



With overhauled multiplayer modes, 26 new missions and loads of new buildings and units, *The Frozen Throne* is the best expansion pack we've seen in ages. If you enjoy the odd bout of orc-bashing and goblin-stabbing then you shouldn't be without it.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA	59%
2	NEW WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	VU GAMES	86%
3	▲ THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA	N/A
4	▼ CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS	90%
5	NEW TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS	68%
6	▲ THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
7	▼ GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	ROCKSTAR	95%
8	NEW NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SOU	ATARI	85%
9	▼ RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT	90%
10	RE WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES	85%



She's riding high in the console charts, but Lara will have to make do with fifth position in our charts. *The Angel Of Darkness* has some great set-pieces, but it's not enough to distract you from the bugs, the flaws and the horrendous control system.



It remains unclear how the word 'Undrentide' ever came into existence, but this hasn't stopped the *Neverwinter* faithful snapping up this expansion pack. With new options, missions and character classes, *Shadows Of Undrentide* is a class act.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

I just hope that come September the charts will be full of more varied games, such as *Half-Life 2*, *Commandos 3* and *Jedi Academy*.

Ace444

Isn't this the same chart as last month? Are you guys taking the mickey here, or what? I bet there's a super secret chart showing the REAL top hitters, rather than this paper-thin tissue of lies.

Csdaveuk

When will they realise that I want *StarCraft 2*! Not *WARcraft*, *STARcraft*. Y'know, the one with the guns and blue people.

PAULKY45



TOP 10

1.	TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
2.	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES
3.	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
4.	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
5.	GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	ROCKSTAR
6.	ENTER THE MATRIX	ATARI
7.	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3	CODEMASTERS
8.	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS
9.	STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE 2	ACTIVISION
10.	RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT

COMPETITION



Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, **PC ZONE** and **Virgin** have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following:

QUESTION: Angelina Jolie plays *Lara Croft* in the *Tomb Raider* flicks, but who is her famous real-life dad?

Answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 133, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD. Closing date: September 18, 2003

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS.

SEPTEMBER

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS	MICROSOFT
APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
AQUANOX 2: THE REVELATION	KOCH MEDIA
BATTLEFIELD 1942: SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII	EA
COLD ZERO: THE LAST STAND	KOCH MEDIA
COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS - ZERO HOUR	EA
COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN	EIDOS
CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2	SCI
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	VU GAMES
DRAGON'S LAIR 3D	UBI SOFT
ENCLAVE	ATARI
FIFA 2004	EA
FREEDOM FIGHTERS	EA
GALAXY ANDROMEDA	CDV
JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION
JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH	VU GAMES
MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT - BREAKTHROUGH	EA
RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD	UBI SOFT
REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION	EIDOS
SILENT STORM	BIG BEN
SÖLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
SPACE COLONY	GATHERING
THE SIMS ONLINE	EA
THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	ATARI
TRON 2.0	DISNEY
VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG	EMPIRE
WHITE DAY	4AM
WILDLIFE PARK	KOCH MEDIA

OCTOBER

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON	THQ
CAPTAIN SCARLET: RETALIATION	BATFISH
EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD	ACTIVISION
JURASSIC WARS: EVOLUTION	4AM
LOCK ON	UBI SOFT
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
SACRED	ASCARON
SILENT HILL 3	KONAMI
SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS	ATARI
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TROTK	EA
X2: THE THREAT	KOCH MEDIA
XIII	UBI SOFT

NOVEMBER

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	UBI SOFT
CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS	ATARI
FAR CRY	UBI SOFT
FIRE WARRIOR	THQ
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
HOMEWORLD 2	VU GAMES
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE	TDK
HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA	ATARI
JOINT OPERATIONS	NOVALOGIC
MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER	VU GAMES
MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEFIELDS	ATARI
POP IDOL	CODEMASTERS
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBI SOFT
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION
TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES	ATARI
TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBI SOFT
WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA	UBI SOFT
WORMS 3	SEGA

DECEMBER

AIRBORNE TROOPS	PLAYLOGIC
EVERQUEST 2	UBI SOFT
FULL THROTTLE: HELL ON WHEELS	ACTIVISION
HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP	EA
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
LORDS OF EVERQUEST	UBI SOFT
MORTYR 2	TBA
STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	ACTIVISION

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

DOOM III

WELL, THE BIG news is you won't be playing *Doom III* this Christmas. A recent announcement from Activision has dashed any hopes of festive fragging, stating that sometime between January and March 2004 is much closer to the mark for its release.

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: id
- ETA: Q2 2004
- Website: www.idsoftware.com



PSYCHOTOXIC



WHISPERS COMING out of CDV are hinting that forthcoming hellish blaster *Psychotoxic* has been shelved for the foreseeable future. Whether this is because the gothic FPS doesn't fit in with their publishing strategy, or simply because it's complete cack is unknown at the time of going to press.

- Publisher: CDV
- Developer: NuClear Vision
- ETA: MIA
- Website: www.psychotoxic.de

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

WE REVIEWED this gem last month, but the bad news is that the strategy fiends and political dissenters among you will have to wait for a little while longer for Elixir's long-awaited title. It seems Eidos is busy translating the game so it can do a worldwide launch in September.

- Publisher: Eidos Interactive
- Developer: Elixir Studios
- ETA: September
- Website: www.novistrana.com



US TOP 10

1	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	VU GAMES
2	STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	SONY
3	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
4	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE	ATARI
5	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES
6	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
7	RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT
8	DIABLO 2	SIERRA
9	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
10	TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS



APOCALYPTICA

Styx and stones will break your bones in Extreme FX's hellish melee battler

Bio Engineer 1

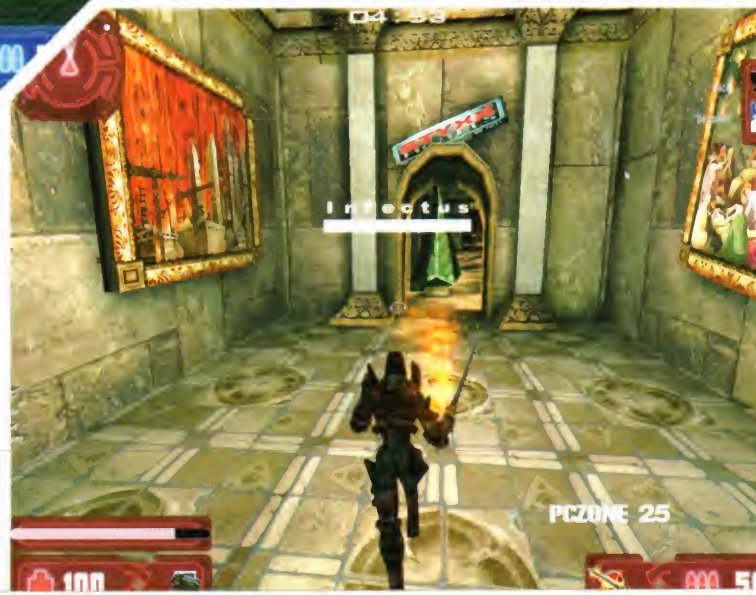
HELL ON Earth, eh? Some would say it's being crushed next to an estate agent's armpit on the London tube, but developer Extreme FX is close to realising its own vision of a dystopian nightmare with *Apocalypica*. Set in a gothic, sci-fi future when ol' Satan himself has razed our planet and unleashed his devilish hordes, *Apocalypica* involves four distinct player classes – Templar Knights, Seraphs, Nuns and Robots – battling for the future of mankind.

A recent hands-on play revealed an intense third-person action/adventure, which in the single-player game has you and your AI-controlled team-mates hacking, slashing and shooting through four different worlds and 18 levels using a new combat system especially created for the PC. Timing the mouse-clicks in conjunction with the movement keys, pulls off triggers combos that range from lethal chain-sword attacks by Knights to explosive spells conjured by angelic Seraphs.

Apocalyptica will also arrive complete with 10 manic multiplayer maps – some reminiscent of *UT*'s Assault games – and the ability to play co-operatively through the single-player campaign. Expect a review next issue...

- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Developer:** Extreme FX
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.apocalyptic.net





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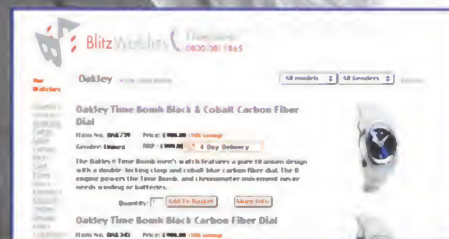
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100% PROOF*

* that you are better at games when you've had a skinful

Booze. Performance-enhancing drug, or the destroyer of high scores? *PC ZONE* hits the bottle to find out. Words: Steve O'Hagan

DRINKING wrecks lives. It's to blame for more than half the road accidents in the UK and can lead to serious mistakes in selecting sexual partners. These things we know. But, along with the reasons behind the popularity of *Big Brother*, one thing mankind has yet to discover is its exact effect on your gaming ability. Does downing a skinful turn you into an incapable fool, or does a hefty dose of Dutch Courage make a fragging machine out of you? Can you dope a gamer with moonshine like you can supercharge a racehorse with steroids?

Realising this desperate lack of knowledge in such a vital area, *PC ZONE* decided to do the human race a favour and conduct a series of highly scientific tests aiming to ascertain the exact effects of alcohol intake on gaming performance. Contained in the following pages are the results, collated and analysed according to strict scientific procedure. They make for extremely interesting reading.



THE EXPERIMENT



Every scientific experiment needs a guinea pig. Or better yet, a group of partially tamed games journalists with too little sense to resist the demands of science. For our groundbreaking research, we assembled no less than four of **ZONE's** finest and isolated them from society (at last) for an evening of tightly controlled observation.

They were first fed with cheap pizza, and then forced to consume frightening amounts of low-grade alcohol while performing a strict set of gaming tests at set points throughout the evening to ascertain the effects the hard stuff was having on their performance. What we discovered was, frankly, astonishing.

HOW THE EVENING FARED



Pizza



Pub



4units



8units



Dave Woods
Editor



Woods doesn't begin the night's drinking in the best of form, declaring after two beers: "I feel like I've had eight pints". But this early pessimism is soon to give way to bravado and outright arrogance.

Woods' scores on *Condition Zero* are not what they might be. "That's bullshit," he screams as he dies (again), his rant falling on deaf ears.



Paul 'Prezzer' Presley
Online Editor



Things start badly as Prezzer spills his first pint in the pub. His gaming efforts are clearly affected by his early cack-handedness, and only a hideous gaffe from the Jamaican keeper can save Prez from early footballing ignominy.

Usually such a composed and placid character, Prezzer's inner demons are summoned forth by four pints of Fosters. In a furious wick, he kicks the table during *Counter-Strike*, signalling his descent into aggression.



Will Porter
Editorial Assistant



"Porter's a good boy really"

WILL PORTER LOSES ALL SENSE OF SELF

Like Prezzer, Porter's night doesn't start well. Incredibly, just two pints are enough to react with the cheap pizza eaten earlier, forcing our Editorial Assistant to launch a technicolour yawn in the WC.



Martin Korda
Senior Reviews Editor



Korda begins the evening with impressive self-control and a commitment to camping in *Counter-Strike*.



"Heskey - you are a f*ing lummoX!"**

KORDA TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

Some snippets deciphered from the administrator's dictaphone...

Admin: Woods, your breathalyzer readings are well low. Your metabolism's too strong for the alcohol.

Woods: This is where the cream rises to the top.

Korda: Shit also rises to the top. Take my word for it 'cos I've shat out some corks in my time.

Woods: Porter. Am I to understand you've disqualified yourself after two pints?

Porter: It's not the beer, it's the pizza.

Woods: I can't believe we employed you.

(Later...) **Porter:** What day is it?

Receptionist: It's 6 in the morning and you're waiting for a taxi to go home

Porter: Zzzzz.

Woods: Britain does the best comedy.

Porter: Yup, 'Allo 'Allo is the funniest ever.

Prez: Hey, you're right, it's brilliant. "Ze madonna wiz ze boobies" (says Prez in a comedy german accent).

Woods: You're both joking right? You two are proper comedians. Did you know that Herr Flick works in our offices?

THE TESTS



1 MIDNIGHT CLUB 2

Each subject raced two laps of the LA Turismo course in Arcade mode driving a Cocotte. The best lap time of the two was recorded.

2 COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

Participants were commanded to play five solo rounds against five normal level AI bots on de_dust. The total number of kills over the five rounds was recorded.

3 ISS 3

Each player was tasked with playing as England against Jamaica in a ten-minute match. The goal difference for each match was recorded, with a 0-1 win to Jamaica being a -1 goal difference.

THE CONDITIONS



Administrator Steve O doing his finest Jonathan King impression.

UNDER THE BEADY EYE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR - STEVE O - A RIGID SET OF CONDITIONS WAS ENFORCED. WOULD BOOZE HELP OR HINDER OUR GAMING? WE HAD TO KNOW THE TRUTH!

- 1 Subjects must drink at the same rate, measured by units of alcohol.
- 2 Subjects can choose from Fosters lager beer, Tesco's smooth-sipping Bourbon mixed with Coca-Cola, and Tesco's Imperial Vodka combined with cranberry juice. Tesco - making shopping easy.
- 3 No eating, other than those foods provided by the administrator.
- 4 No water.
- 5 No other intoxicants to be consumed, including caffeine and jazz woodbines.
- 6 No fighting.
- 7 No tactical chundering.
- 8 No stopping until science is satisfied.



12units



14units



16units



18units



20units



By this point the already less than modest Woods is becoming increasingly arrogant. Correspondingly, he becomes ever more mentally enfeebled, as demonstrated by his attempts to light the wrong end of cigarette.

Early evening optimism and outright conceitedness has given way to a bleak fatalism as the 18th unit of booze slips down. "I'm too pissed," he drawls as Jamaica bests him at ISS. "That's it - I've peaked."

"That's it - I've peaked" WOODS FINDS HIS LIMIT



Reduced to a shadow of his former self, Woods insists on filing an official complaint. "Those enemies couldn't have known I was hiding there!" he bleats in his final Counter-Strike round, before getting lost on lap two in Midnight Club 2.



The previously unknown angry side to the Presley's character is now increasingly coming to the fore. While launching the most brutal tackles ever seen in a game of ISS 3, he begins a tirade of profanities that is nearly unceasing until his eventual unconsciousness.

"Eurgh. What day is it?" PREZZER FUMBLES AS HIS PERCEPTIONS START TO FAIL HIM

PREZZER FUMBLES AS HIS PERCEPTIONS START TO FAIL HIM

As the units rack up, young Will refers to our beloved mag as PC SHONE, like some lisping wino. "Stop feeding me beer," he whimpers, "Porter's a good boy really," beginning a worrying trend of referring to himself in the third-person, like some beery Gollum.



The only intelligible words now ushering forth from Porter's gob are expletives, particularly while posting a big fat 0 score in Condition-Zero. Maybe Alex Ferguson should sign him as Manchester United's new goalkeeper?



Though appearing to have become lost on one lap of Midnight Club 2, the drunken bear-baiter threatens the administrator with violence over a disputed score. An ugly scene, and one we had hoped to avoid.

"Administrator! Where's the f***ing camera!!" is bellowed at least five times from the big man as his second goal against Jamaica flies in.

Becoming ever more rumbustious, he voices what the nation has been thinking for the past three years during an early ISS 3 match: "Go on Heskey - you are a f***ing lummoxt!"



Korda: I feel bloated.

Porter: You were bloated when we started, you're bloated now.

K: Are you calling me fat?

P: No, just nice and big.

Woods: It's not about size, or weight or anything - my body can just absorb alcohol better than yours.

Korda: Your tolerance is better, admittedly, but put us in an Iron Man match and I'd tear your spine out and play it like a glockenspiel.



PCZONE 3

You've seen the tits we've made of ourselves, but it was all done in the name of science. Let us now assess the results in the cold light of day...

SECONDARY OBSERVATIONS

PARANOIA

PARANOIA

As alcohol intake increases, a Stalinist-style culture of blame and suspicion develops, wherein participants begin doubting each other's integrity and commitment to the experiment. "Steve, Dave's skiving on his drinks," says one. This phenomenon causes huge rifts in the team and enormous splits in team morale. Another popular target for blame and bile is the in-game AI.



PRIDE

PRIDE Subjects become increasingly concerned about their scores and how they'll look in the magazine. A palpable sense of macho pride abounds, and faces become ever more twisted and contorted in concentration. Martin Korda even sneakily deletes an incriminating photo from the digital camera that shows him in an apparently passionate clinch with Woods. Repressed? The jury's out on the big man.



AGGRESSION

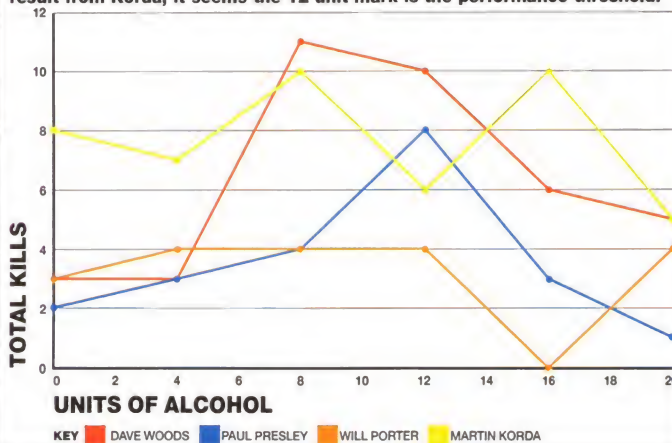
AGGRESSION

The deadly cocktail of games and booze results in exaggerated levels of testosterone, soon giving way to sheer violence. Korda goes as far as to threaten physical bodily harm when one of his disputed scores is not recorded as he wants, while Woods and Porter become belligerent towards the PC itself, violently slamming keyboards and monitors. Presley also confronts the administrator as his consciousness ebbs away, threatening to discontinue the experiment if his demands are not met.



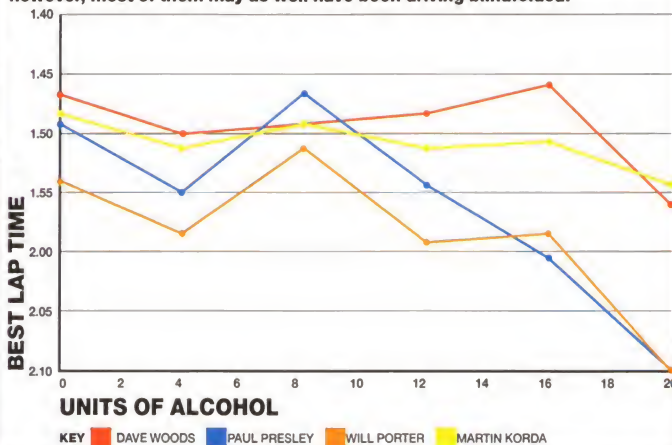
COUNTER STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

A dose of Dutch Courage doesn't go amiss in battle. Like soldiers across history, our subjects found killing is less of a weight upon the conscience when pissed out of your mind. Furthermore, a reasonable intake of alcohol can steady the hand and enhance confidence. Apart from an impressive late result from Korda, it seems the 12 unit mark is the performance threshold.



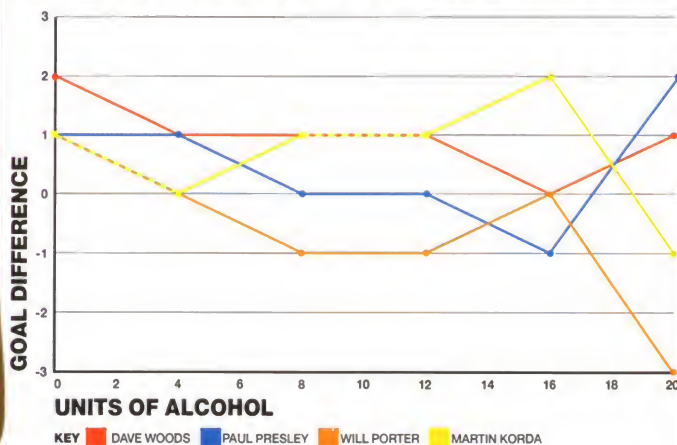
MIDNIGHT CLUB 2

In a simulated world where crashing into a wall at 100mph does not result in a terrible and instant death, hitting the bottle before getting behind the wheel can be just what the doctor ordered. Practically all our subjects showed modest to good gains in their times until after the eight unit mark. After that, however, most of them may as well have been driving blindfolded.



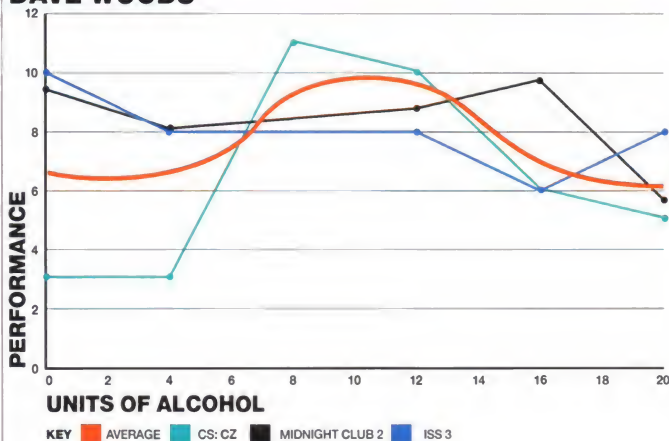
ISS 3

Football, it seems, is best played sober. Like the average fan, a skinful will make you hurl abuse and profanities at those on the pitch, and will give you an exaggerated estimation of your knowledge of the game. The only thing we can extrapolate here is a certain 'wild card' factor bestowed by many ales, exemplified by outstanding late results from Korda and Presley.



WORKING OUT PLAYER PERFORMANCE

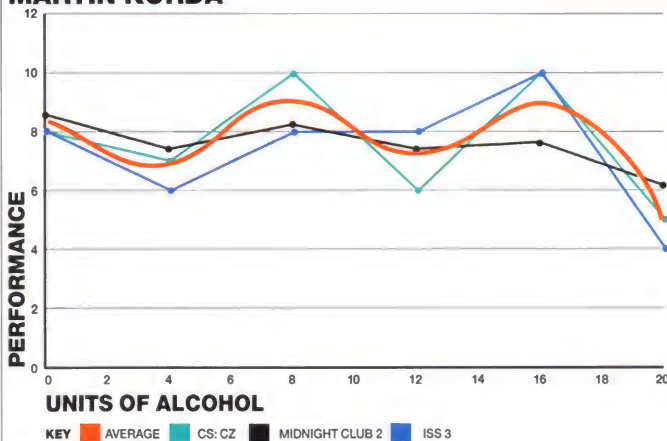
DAVE WOODS



DRINKING CLASS: Seasoned veteran

Worryingly, his driving was particularly enhanced by excessive amounts of alcohol, demonstrating the gap between reality and games – until the crucial 20 unit mark was reached. Similarly, his ability to dispatch terrorists was noticeably enhanced by modest quantities of booze, but his football skills were seemingly unaffected until severely bladdered at 18 units, whereupon distinguishing one team from another became impossible.

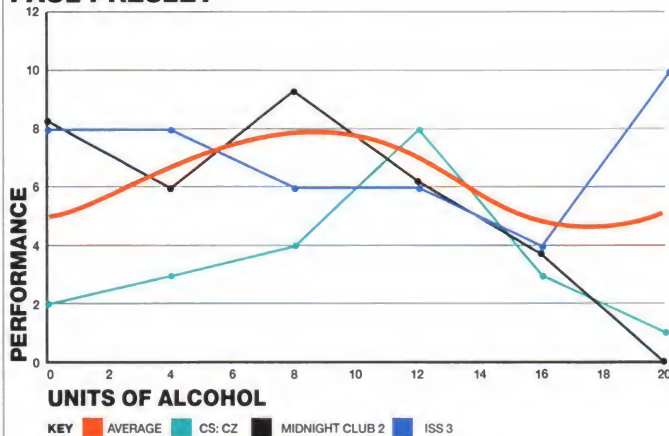
MARTIN KORDA



DRINKING CLASS: Middleweight

Korda's overbearing, gym-perfected frame creates problems when it comes to alcohol intake – if only all that muscle was billowing flab, his alcohol tolerance would no doubt be stronger. Nevertheless, improved performance levels can be noted in all three games up until the the equivalent of eight pints had been imbibed. In particular, his footballing performance was very much inflated, a phenomenon none of the other participants displayed in common.

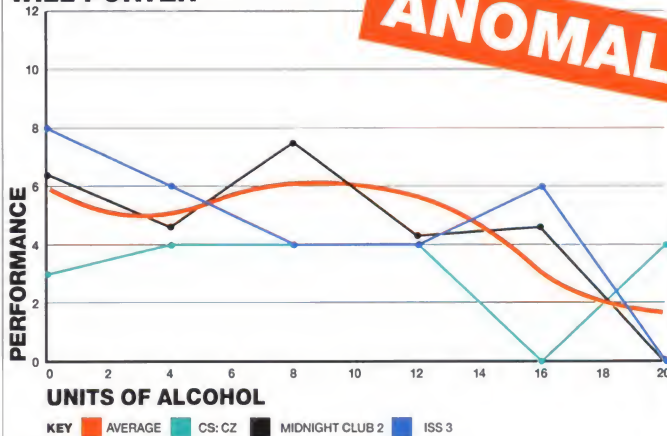
PAUL PRESLEY



DRINKING CLASS: Occasional lightweight

Although Presley warned us of his unsuitability for the task on account of his lacklustre alcohol tolerance, his fortitude proved of sterner stuff than even he could have imagined. A late, semi-miraculous 2-0 victory over Jamaica at ISS 3 was proof enough of this. And while his *Counter-Strike* scores were pitiful for a man who calls himself Online Editor, the temporary boost a bunch of beers made to his kill counts goes to fit our hypothesis, as outlined below.

WILL PORTER



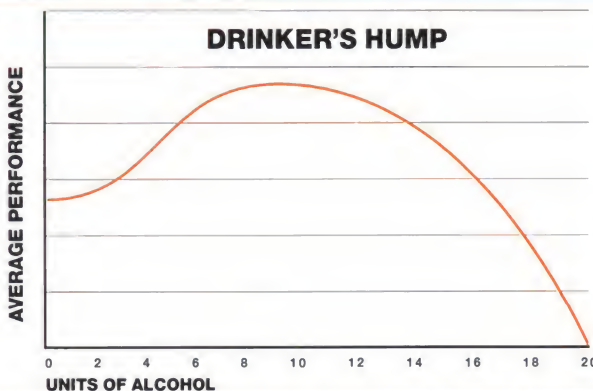
DRINKING CLASS: Apprentice

Porter is a difficult case to draw any conclusions from as his results show a similar amount of ineptitude whether inebriated or sober. Atrocious scores across the board only got worse once the 16 unit threshold was crossed, bar a brief rally behind the wheel. This, in view of his dubious 'was it tactical or not' early-evening chunder, leads us to eliminate Porter's results from our conclusions. Sorry mate, but at least the beer was free.

OUR CONCLUSION – BOOZE IS FOR CHEATS

The graph below describes what we have christened the Drinker's Hump. This curve was extrapolated from plotting the average performance of Woods, Korda and Presley, as shown. Porter's anomalous results were discarded. What this shows is modest amounts of firewater can enhance gaming performance, particularly in driving and shooting games. But the line between gently sozzled and embarrassingly rat-arsed is a fine one – push the boat out too far (approximately 12 units or more) and Gamer's Droop is sure to take hold.

Most worryingly for gamers is that this means it can't be long until we see the first Carl Lewis of gaming. Therefore, we urge LAN party organisers and Internet tournament hosts everywhere to beware of doping. Ban alcohol! Permit Pepsi, Doritos and Pizza only. Or there'll always be someone guzzling a four pack of Skol in a pitiful attempt to enhance their performance.



HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you like a tippie when you're playing games? Does it improve your performance or leave you foundering at the bottom of the scoreboard? Log on to the PC ZONE forums at www.pczone.co.uk, look for the "Drinking and Games" thread and air your boozy secrets. Alternatively, send us a letter at letters@pczone.co.uk.



Before the dark times, before the Empire...

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

On another of his damn fool idealistic crusades, *Richie Shoemaker* goes back to a more civilised age

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER BioWare Corp

PUBLISHER Activision

WEBSITE

www.lucasarts.com/products/swkotor

ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Enough story to fill a new trilogy
- Spectacular real-time combat
- Follow the Light or turn to the Dark Side and, yes, you get to build your own Lightsaber
- Dozens of skills, Force powers and even a few mini games
- No Anakin, no Jar Jar and no Ewoks

CV

BIOWARE
CRAP

BIOWARE CORP

It feels like they've been around forever but in a relatively short space of time the Canadian coders have become the kings of PC role-playing

- 1996** BioWare's debut is *Shattered Steel*, which you may be surprised to learn wasn't some RPG about a broken bracer, but actually a goblin-free 3D shooter with robots.
- 1998** *Baldur's Gate* puts BioWare on the map, somewhere between the Misty Mountains and the Prancing Pony. *The Sword Coast* add-on follows in 1999.
- 2000** More sci-fi action arrives in the form of *MDK 2* for Dreamcast, PC and PS2, and to top off a busy year the team reels out the time-sapping *Baldur's Gate II*.
- 2002** AD&D goes 3D for the first time in *Neverwinter Nights*.
- 2003** *Knights Of The Old Republic* released to universal acclaim. Two new BioWare games are set to be announced, both RPGs, neither of which, curiously enough, are based on Star Wars or AD&D. Watch this space...



The Empire isn't even a twinkle in Darth Sidius' eye, but there's still plenty of rumbling to be had.

IN THREE MONTHS time PC players will finally be able to enjoy the first proper role-playing game to be set in a galaxy far, far away. Trust us when we tell you that the wait is going to be worth it. The game is essentially complete – in fact the Xbox version is now available in the States – and we've played through the latest version of the PC game. Twice. (It's that good.)

Even on Xbox, some are proclaiming this as one of the finest role-playing games ever made, and when *Knights Of The Old Republic* becomes available on the machine for which it was originally intended, it's going to be even better. How much better we don't yet know, but if it's just a teensy iddy-biddy bit better, come Christmas we'll be as eagerly attached to it as a mynock to a power coupling.

Part of the reason why *Knights Of The Old Republic* has received so much attention is down to creators BioWare, a studio solely responsible for reviving what was, until *Baldur's Gate* came along, a genre suffering a crippling –3 to all popularity rolls. Since then they've imparted a sequel, then last year's *Neverwinter Nights*, cementing their reputation as the finest BRPG (beardy role-playing game) developer in the free world. Who better then to fashion the first ever Star Wars dice 'em up?

But the other reason for all the hubbub is that chronologically speaking *Knights* is set across virgin Star Wars territory – a full 4,000 years before a certain Miss S Skywalker lay in the maternity suite at Mos Espa General and screamed from her hydro-stirrups "the Force is wrong in this one." What this

means is that there is no Vader, no Stormtroopers and certainly no Death Star. And you know what, you won't miss them one bit.

MEDIEVAL EMPIRE

The Old Republic, far from being some Neanderthal governance, is much as Old Ben described it: a more civilised age, where hokey religions and ancient weapons reign supreme. If you were expecting – or Force forbid, hoping – that *Knights Of The Old Republic* would feature primitive hairy-backed Jedi dressed in Wampa skins, beating the crap out of mono-browed Sith warriors with wax-powered Lightclubs, well, you'd be disappointed to say the least. The general look of the cities and towns is much more art deco than *Phantom Menace* ever was, with a dash of the



It's 4,000 years earlier, but the pig-men are just as obnoxious.

"Already, some are proclaiming *Knights* as one of the finest role-playing games ever made"

medieval thrown in for good measure. However, despite the yawning chasm of time that separates ancient Star Wars from modern, the game is distinctly Star Wars throughout; protocol droids hobble about the bustling towns and spaceports, familiar aliens – among them Twi'leks, Rodians and Ithorians – go about their shady business. And when you do eventually end up in a fight, the familiar shrill of blaster fire and hum of Lightsaber can quickly be heard. Make no mistake, *Knights Of The Old Republic* is as Star Warsy as you could ever hope for.

ONLY HUMAN

Of course this wouldn't be much of an RPG if it didn't allow you to create an alter ego beforehand and of the 40 or so sentient species that inhabit the various

planets of the Star Wars universe, you can choose to play as any of them – just so long as they're human. You then choose between three character types: a Soldier skilled in the arts of weaponry, a sneaky Scoundrel or a somewhere-between-the-two Scout. The character class you choose will to some extent dictate your attributes (strength, dexterity, wisdom etc). After tinkering with these you get to assign skill

points and select a couple of special abilities – called Feats, which range from mundane skill bonuses to combat abilities that improve accuracy or the amount of damage you can inflict with certain types of weapon.


Although you're limited early on by a slight lack of playable races and classes, it isn't long before recruits are joining your merry band of freedom fighters. A total of nine characters may join your group throughout the game, among them mercenaries, droids, a Wookiee and the odd Force-sensitive Jedi, and up to three of these can be selected to join your personal entourage at any one time.

FREEDOM FORCE

Of course, Star Wars wouldn't be Star Wars without some galactic civil war kicking off around the place and in this particular conflict The Republic is being soundly thrashed by the Sith as they advance on the Core worlds. You'll begin the game as a new recruit freshly posted aboard the Ender Spire, a Republic cruiser on the run from a Sith fleet set on capturing a Jedi named Bastila. As the Sith board the ship, Bastila bails out to the planet below and it becomes your mission to find her and escape before the Sith patrols get hold of her. By the time you do you are left in doubt as to the path your character will take.

KotOR's replayability lies in the amount of choices you can make, not just in respect of solving puzzles and playing through the story, but choices





"It's the first RPG in some time in which you can't help but get attached to the characters"

The PC version will share an identical storyline to its console cousin, set 4,000 before The Empire.

and actions that will dictate your destiny as regards to your Force alignment. Kill NPCs rather than befriend them and your Force-o-Meter will creep slowly towards the red, your face will even change to reflect your inner anger and in front of the otherwise tolerant Jedi Council you will have to openly lie.

There are currently over 40 different Force powers in the game and while all

are available to master, depending on whether you are closer to the Light or Dark side of the Force, certain powers will cost more to perform.

JUST PAUSE

Combat in *Knights Of The Old Republic* is carried out in real-time, but for those that prefer their tactics turn-based, the action can be paused at the press of a

key. Each character can simply target an enemy and pick a weapon firing mode, special ability or Force power and the action is played out with the computer rolling the virtual dice in the background. If one of your party is eliminated they stay down until the fight is over. If you win they scramble to their feet in need of medical attention. If you lose you all stay down permanently.

Although the combat may seem rather simplistic (terrain seems not to be a factor for example), the battles are entirely driven by skills. Best of all, more powers and feats become available as your characters progress, and towards the end of the game combat not only becomes more strategic but furiously entertaining, with Jedi Knights cavorting across the screen, fingers pulsing with



Some Force powers are more evil than others...



The Falcon-like Ebon Hawk will be your base of operations on most planets.



RPG rules determine every shot and strike, but you need never know about it.

electric Force energy and Lightsabers spinning all over the place. Quite beautiful really.

USE THE VOICE

Apart from the combat, the lengthy and well-paced story, the wealth of weapons, powers and abilities, BioWare has found time to flesh out the characters to quite a degree. Each member of your party

has a lengthy history you can explore by chatting with them at length when there's a lull in the action. Because of this, each character is afforded a great deal of personality, and this is the first RPG in some time in which you can't help but get emotionally attached to the characters. Similarly, if you're hankering to join the Dark Side, it's easy to tire of their constant whining. A nice touch.

Why Don't You?...



Oh, I get it. Let's play with the old man's head, is it? He's half-senile, he'll forget I said anything! Wait... what was this about...?

Haven't I seen you some place before?

I FIND YOUR LACK OF FACE DISTURBING...

While the world of *KotOR* abounds with NPCs, the current version suffers from having a rather slender variety of faces to stick on them. Consequently there are times when you approach three different people, all of whom appear to be identical. At one part in the story, the abrupt and suspicious lieutenant of a gang berates your motives for helping them, but when you approach her opposite number in the enemy gang, it appears to be the same character voiced by the same person. It doesn't take long to figure out the truth, but such instances are many and detract attention from what is otherwise a very immersive game. So more faces please BioWare. And more furniture while you're at it.

IT'S A MINI ADVENTURE



Do you know anything about the planet we're on?
Do you feel like playing some Pazak?
I need you to make me a security spike.

The mini games, among other things, betray a hefty *Final Fantasy* influence.

LIKE ALL GOOD RPGS, MINI GAMES ADD SPICE TO THE ACTION...

Saving the galaxy can be a tiring business, which is why on most planets in the game there are places you can go to just kick back and relax. Watch the Twi'lek girls get jiggy with their head tentacles, listen to the cantina band rock the house, or perhaps go for a massage and soothe your troubles away. Or, if you fancy making some extra cash, you could try these...

PAZAK

Pazak is the most popular card game in the known universe. A cross between Blackjack and Top Trumps, the idea is to turn over cards and not exceed a score of 20. Cards can have a positive or a negative value and as you go through the game you can buy extra decks. Actually, not at all like Top Trumps.

SWOOP RACING

Swoop bike racing is the Old Republic's most popular motor sport, similar in many respects to Pod Racing, except not quite as fast. Also, you race against the clock rather than other riders and you always fly in a straight line. *Gran Turismo* it certainly ain't, but it's an easy way to bring in credits.

DUEL

It's WWE, but with guns that have been made safe. On the planet of Taris are a few duelists looking to take a scalp and an easy bunch they are to dispense with too. Beat all comers and you'll be the toast of the Upper City.



Behind you!



Episode 1: Racer anyone?



For an RPG, the combat is remarkably exciting.

The dialogue itself is exhaustive and professionally delivered. And with John Williams' familiar strains running through it, the sound overall is top notch.

If we were to have any concerns at this stage they would be minor ones. The puzzles we've encountered in the game aren't the most taxing, but the lack of potentially frustrating moments lends the game a sense of pace that rarely lets up. This is helped by the fact that the action is set across a variety of worlds, all of which (apart from Tatooine, which is, perforce, in every Star Wars game) will be unfamiliar to you.

THE FORCE IS STRONG

Already the PC version far surpasses the Xbox game in terms of graphical loveliness, although BioWare's plans for the PC incarnation extend beyond adding high detail texture maps. As you would expect it's the control system and interface that are receiving the greatest attention, and we hope that with mouse control fully in place, sifting through the inventory and exploring the in-game map will be a breeze.

Although hardly what you'd call a hardcore RPG, we reckon *Knights Of The Old Republic* has enough going for it to appeal to any PC game fan. Star Wars enthusiasts will be in hog heaven exploring the Star Wars' prehistory, while the dialogue, storyline and sheer depth of the game will appeal to anyone pining for a good adventure. After playing *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (see review on page 62) it's a difficult call to make which is better, but with a few minor tweaks we're confident that *Knights* on PC will be one of the very finest interactive experiences Star Wars has to offer. In this or any other era. **[A-]**



The many side-quests are worth completing, if only to get items and experience.



Even the most promising and disciplined Jedi can be tempted to follow the dark path.

THE DISCS THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

THE TIMES THEY ARE NOT

It seems there are still considerable numbers of PC gamers who've yet to upgrade to a DVD-ROM drive. Which seems bizarre in this day and age, and has also condemned us to some serious disc swapping if we want to play *KotOR*. Unlike the one-disc console version, it looks like *Knights* is going to fill no less than four CDs when it arrives on PC. LucasArts assure us they are looking into the possibility of doing a DVD version, but we're not entirely confident that if they do, it will make it onto UK shelves.

WHY NO MULTIPLAYER?



Multiplayer *KotOR* could work, honest it could!

BIOWARE HAS ALREADY PROVED THE FEASIBILITY OF MULTIPLAYER RPGS, SO WHY NOT HERE?

It's perhaps too obvious to wish for a full and proper multiplayer game to be slotted into *Knights Of The Old Republic*, seeing as *Star Wars Galaxies* (reviewed last issue) is hoping to fulfil that role, but after playing BioWare's sublime party-based online feature from *Neverwinter Nights*, it seems a shame for them to not attempt something similar with *Knights*. Alas, it seems pretty unlikely, as the Xbox version of the game has now shipped. If you want to play a Star Wars RPG online it looks like you're going to have to wait for the UK release of *Galaxies*.

"The dialogue, story and sheer depth of the game will appeal to anyone pining for adventure"



Put some clothes on man!



"Damn these awful SF conventions..."



Compete online against up to 16 players in Disc Arena.

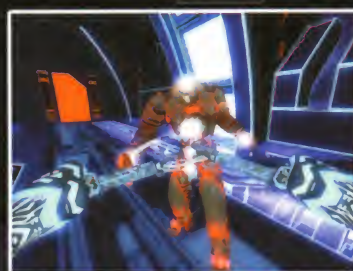


Step up to the Light Cycle Grid and compete for your existence in SP mode or via LAN.

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Play up to 30 levels as Jet Bradley battling intense corruption while looking for his father Alan.



Innovative subroutine system which allows players to fine tune characters and weapons.

Enter the
Cult World of TRON
and fight a sinister cyber battle that
threatens to corrupt one reality and
forever transform another.

'one of the most visually beautiful & distinctive games we have ever encountered' PC Gamer

'Visually it is wondrous & immaculate' Edge

'It really is sublime...' PC Gamer

Just find me some worthwhile competition...
not the usual cream-puffs you keep sending me
someone who can think and move at light speed

MONOLITH

Maximize your experience with
pentium 4

PC
CD

BUENA
VISTA
INTERACTIVE

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Pre-order now
Out 19th Sept 2003



The developers are determined to push emotion in RPGs to the next level and they have the facial animation system to do it.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Troika Games
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.troikagames.com
ETA 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It uses the same engine and AI as *Half-Life 2*
- It's going to seamlessly blend the dice-rolling of the RPG with the people-shooting of the FPS
- It's dirty, immoral, corrupt and quite beautiful
- Seven different vampire clans to choose from and loads of unique vampire powers for you to use/abuse

CV



TROIKA GAMES

It may only have one game to its name, but this So-Cal outfit has a reputation for making RPGs that positively ooze personality and charm

1997 The three chaps who will go on to found Troika make up the core creative team responsible for *Fallout*, an epic post-apocalyptic role-player.

1998 Troika is formed and development begins on *Arcanum: Of Steamworks And Magick Obscura*. A strange RPG that may not have looked great, but blended magic and technology to good effect.

2003 As well as *Vampires*, Troika reveals that it is also working on a *D&D Third Edition* RPG, *Greyhawk: The Temple Of Elemental Evil*.

Can you dig it, (blood) sucker?

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

Guns, ghouls and... experience points? *Will Porter* hears from the men behind the role-playing shooter that's going to turn your puny world upside down

FOR YEARS mortal propaganda has been chipping away at us, hoodwinking us into believing that it's not much fun being a vampire. "Your complexion will become pallid," they claim. "You'll develop severe allergies to common foodstuffs and sharpened pieces of wood." "You'll become a slave to an unquenchable thirst for human blood." Lies! Damned lies! Well, maybe not, but you can be undead and still be hip, and *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is going to show you how.

Put simply, if this title manages to pull off what it promises then the RPG world will be set on fire. It's still early days, but *Bloodlines* looks set to intricately meld the traits of the traditional RPG with the intense shootery of the FPS. Stuff like experience points, character groups, quests and NPC interaction are still here, but so is an arsenal of weapons that covers knives, submachine guns,

flamethrowers and 'stakeguns'. If you add to the mix your 12 different vampire powers (supernatural speed, invisibility, mind control, superhuman strength and the like), then it becomes clear that we are looking at what might be described as a *Deus Ex* with pointy teeth. And it uses *Half-Life*'s Source Engine. Excited yet?

SUCK YOU DRY

So how does it work? We caught up with Troika bigwig Leonard Boyarsky and producer Thaine Lyman, and they told us all about it. "The main goal is to create an experience that has the spirit of the paper and pencil version of the game," says Leonard. "You can play as one of seven different clans, each of which represents a different part of vampire lore. For example, a Toreador clan member is suave and seductive – an Anne Rice style vampire – while the Nosferatu is a hideous beast stalking in the shadows."

The game itself is split into four major hubs: Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Hollywood and Chinatown. Each of these has multiple conflict areas associated with it. The player interacts with NPCs, receives quests and buys equipment in the safe areas of each hub before moving out to the action. From what *Zone* has seen, the environments that you'll be battling through are vast and wide-ranging, covering all the grubby aspects of the seedy American underground: nightclubs, dodgy hotels, Hollywood Mansions and the more traditional gothic caverns and graveyards.

What's more, these environments and the myriad characters that you meet in them will react to you according to the choices you make, your clan, your abilities and the reputation that you've developed through your (mis)deeds. So if you've recently sucked the plasma out of someone's virgin younger sister, they

VAMPIRE CLANS: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

THERE ARE SEVEN CLANS OF BLOODSUCKER TO CHOOSE FROM IN *BLOODLINES* – WHICH ONE WILL YOU BE?

BRUJAH: Largely consisting of rebels and misfits, the Brujah are a fearsome bunch, but no bugger trusts them.

GANGREL: Mystical, nomadic and faintly bemusing. The Gangrel will read you a poem before sucking your guts out.

MALKAVIAN: The Malkavian are vampire mentalists – one minute they could be catatonic, the next they could have detached your spinal cord.

NOSFERATU: Twisted, deformed and unlikely to have regular sex, the Nosferatu are old school evil, with pointy ears.

TOREADOR: Outwardly suave, sophisticated and charming, Toreadors are a good example of what happens when a vamp is brought up in a posh public school.

TREMERE: Treacherous and cunning, the Tremere are sinister even by undead standards. If they were human they'd all be Coventry City supporters. (*Clear your desk – Ed*)

VENTRUE: Old fashioned, traditional and born leaders in the Dracula mould, a Ventrue vampire can generally be found ordering peasants about and drinking sherry. And blood.

are unlikely to welcome you with open arms (let alone open veins).

And of course, throbbing beautifully in the background, lies the Source Engine. "When we first saw the engine demoed for us we were blown away by the facial animation," enthuses Leonard. "When you're talking with someone in the game you see their body language, you see their expressions, you see how they're dressed – you see their entire attitude projected towards you. When a character gets angry at you, you know it. When they're happy with you, you know it. When they want to make you dinner, you know it."

BITING TALK

If *Fallout* is anything to go by, Troika is pretty much the best in the business when it comes to NPC chitchat. Armed with this technology we could be in for encounters and characters that are so immersive you won't be able to tell the difference between playing the game and going down the shops for a pint of milk (or a quart of type A-positive).

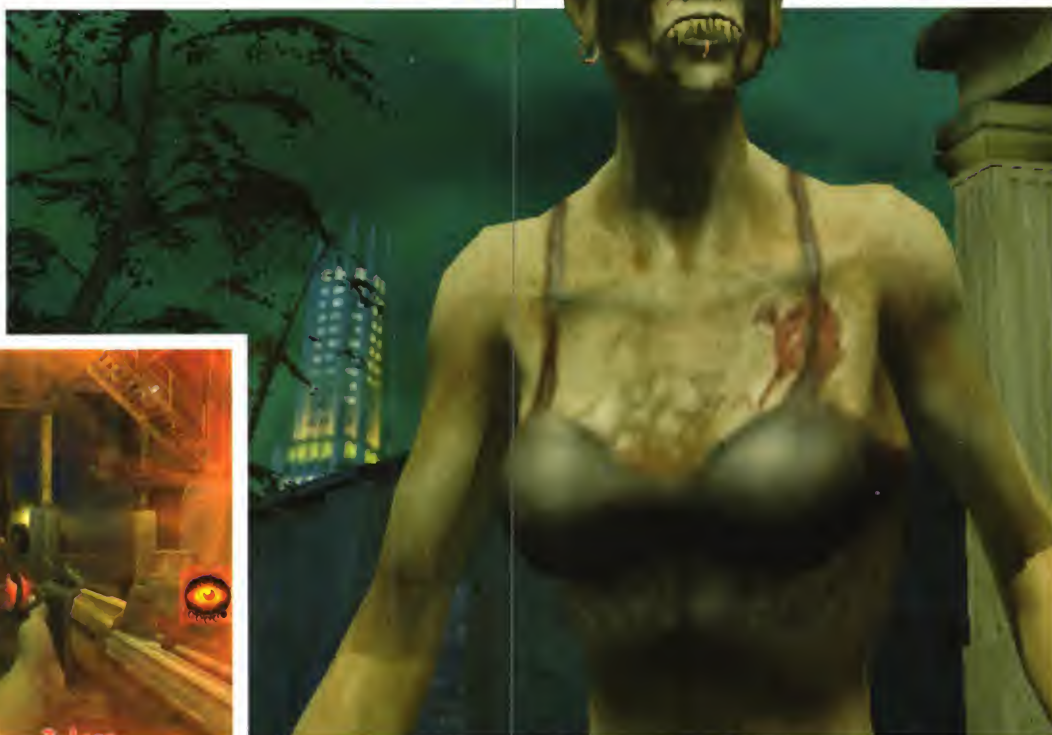
"A vampire has various disciplines that you can access through speech – you can choose to dominate somebody or perhaps intimidate them, and from this you can see how it is that they respond to you emotionally," says Leonard.

By their own admission, the 19-strong team behind *Bloodlines* found that "using somebody else's engine is like jumping into a cold pool." But on the evidence we've seen, 18 months of development have turned this pool into a spa-bath with

"When we first saw the engine demoed for us we were blown away by the facial animation"

LEONARD BOYARSKY
TROIKA GAMES

three waterslides and a wave-machine. In most previous role-players, original designs and visions have had to be compressed into characters with pixels for faces, with even main characters being scrunched up into 2in-high models. These days every fold, wrinkle and zit in the artwork can find their way to someone's face, and the team is clearly enjoying the freedom that this affords. The visuals may not match those we've seen in *Half-Life 2*,



Some good old-fashioned bosses are waiting to kick your ass.

Not the face you'd want to wake up to after a night on the piss.



Women of ill-repute. Fat tattooed barmen. Unconscious bodies. Just like the PC ZONE local.

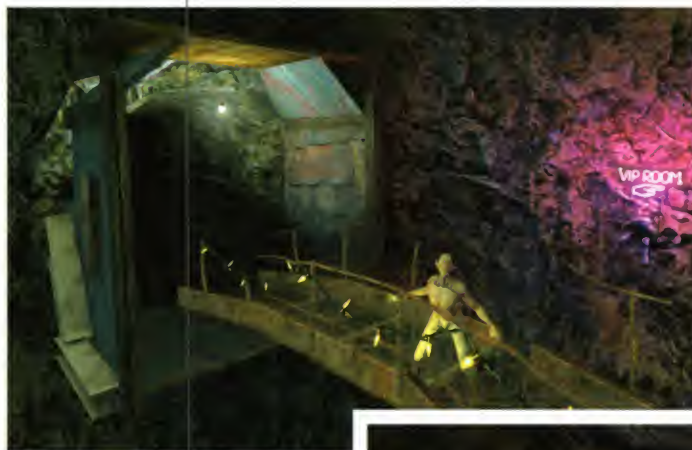
but they're still out of this world. "We've added our own particle system," points out Leonard, "which gives us a lot more artistic control. We added our own lighting system too, because a game that takes place at night has very different demands from a game that plays out during daylight. We had to incorporate a lot more shadows and moody lighting. So there is almost a film quality to it."

IN YOUR FACE

Those of you with above-average memory will be aware that it wasn't always like this. *V:tM - Redemption* was an isometric party-based affair that started its story back in the dark ages: it was old school (that's old school with a beard rather than a tub of drugs and a whistle). So why the sudden shift in gears?

"There's an immediacy that a first-person experience can provide that the third person generally can't," explains Thaine. "With a shooter-style model you're actively engaging in stealth tactics or combat, and it's you yourself controlling the action. The stats affect the gameplay, but the player is the one who

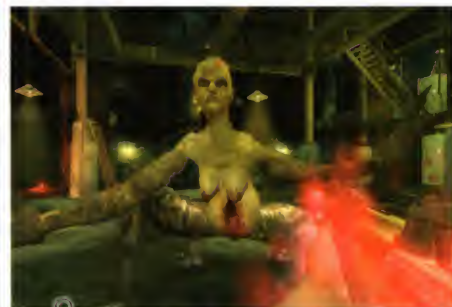
is actually responsible." This is clearly a far cry from the games in which you click on a beastly and sit back while your character cleaves meat from its ribcage. "NPCs will take cover when you're fighting and they'll respond to factors like which clan you belong to, and what you say to them. They'll search you out.



A vampire bridge, yesterday.



The undead can be fashionable too.



Troika are clearly subscribers to "50 And Over".

They'll throw things at you. We used a lot of the *Half-Life 2* combat AI, and a lot of their scripted stuff, but we had to add a lot of the RPG-specific stuff ourselves. There are multiple ways to get through our game, so we have to accommodate the fact that the player can have different experiences getting to a certain area."

If you've seen the E3 *Bloodlines* video you'll have noticed that it has a number of similarities with what we've seen of its ginger, radioactive step-brother, *Half-Life 2*. One notable scene has a monster picking up corpses and lobbing them at you, while elsewhere the physics engine shows off with an enthusiastic jiggle of an NPC's over-sized breasts.

Bloodlines will also have extensive Modding capabilities and epic vampire vs vampire hunter multiplayer battles. "We feel we are working on something that is going to open people's eyes", says Leonard. "Back when we made *Fallout* we felt we were doing the same sort of thing, almost like we are rejuvenating a genre that had pretty much died."

For us, *Bloodlines* carries with it big expectations. The right people are making the right game with the right source material. They are also using the most incredible game engine ever made. The colour of next season is undoubtedly going to be black. [X]

Why Don't You?...

THERE ISN'T MUCH TO BE IMPROVED ON IN *BLOODLINES*, BUT HOW ABOUT A BIT OF A *CARRIE*-STYLE RAMPAGE?



Now, telekinesis isn't exactly a part of traditional vampire mythology – Bram Stoker missed that one to be honest. But with the Source engine and its incredible physics, wouldn't it be cool if you could manipulate objects and hurl them into the faces of your enemies? You could be standing unarmed in front of a rival vamp, but with a twitch of your eyebrow you could fling a nearby stake into his fat black heart.



There are seven clans to choose from. None of them look happy.

THE GREAT ESCAPETM



www.thegreatescapesgame.com



THE GREAT ESCAPE Interactive Game (certain audiovisual components) TM & © 2003 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. THE GREAT ESCAPE Motion Picture © 1953 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. THE GREAT ESCAPE Interactive Game (software) © 2003 SCI Games Limited, developed by Pivotal Games Limited. Steve McQueen™ Licensed by Chadwick McQueen and The Terry McQueen Testamentary Trust. Represented by The Roger Richman Agency, Inc. www.stevemcqueen.com. All Rights Reserved. PlayStation and the PS Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc. Microsoft, Xbox and the Xbox logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the U.S. and/or other countries.



You can move almost anything with your mind powers.



Effects like smoke and explosions have a cel-shaded look.



Advent Rising will have its own version of Bullet-Time, only you'll move a lot faster than your foes.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER GlyphX Games

PUBLISHER VU Games

WEBSITE Summer 2004

ETA www.adventriling.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Heavy weaponry, vehicles, hand-to-hand combat, special moves and god-like powers – it's the best of *Jedi Knight*, *Halo*, *Max Payne* and *The Matrix* all rolled into one
- Renowned sci-fi scribe Orson Scott Card is adapting the story of the Advent Trilogy – books and films are in the pipeline
- Uses the latest Unreal tech
- Hugely cinematic and dramatic – you'll cry, you'll laugh, you'll wet your pants

CV

GLYPHX

GLYPHX GAMES

Advent Rising may be their first game, but Utah-based GlyphX have been navigating the secret paths and backroads of the game industry for years

- 1994** The company is formed, initially as a marketing organisation, but later moves into doing bits and pieces for games
- 1998** GlyphX creates designs and animations for Eidos' *Soul Reaver*
- 2000** After years of planning, production begins on the ambitious *Advent Trilogy*
- 2002** Development on *Advent Rising* gets into full swing; the company continues to fund itself by creating artwork for the likes of Epic and Sony

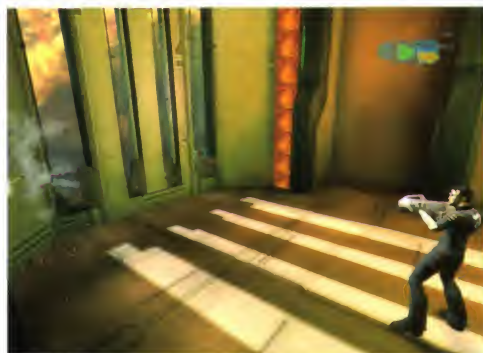
Combat evolving...

ADVENT RISING

Richie Shoemaker travels to Utah to visit the hitherto unknown developer aiming to run rings around *Halo*... and every other action game you care to mention



Vehicles range from hover tanks and jetpacks to massive spaceships, but it's the speeder bikes we want most.



The Unreal lighting system used to good effect.

GLYPHX'S OFFICES

reside in Orem, Utah, just over from a typically American suburban stretch of road; arrow-straight and lined with whitewashed houses, each one perched on a lawn of perfect green that looks as if it was delivered fresh that morning. Cars occasionally float by, pedestrians are unheard of and litter is nowhere to be seen. It could almost be described as idyllic, were it not for the fact that inside, away from the 100-plus degree heat, a small team of developers is plotting to drop a bomb on the gaming world.

The incendiary device in question is *Advent Rising*, the first of an audaciously conceived trilogy of action games that promises to up the ante in terms of storyline, emotion and player involvement. GlyphX at least, with an infectious air of enthusiasm, earnestly believe that their debut release will cause a stir. "Valve made *Half-Life* out of passion," says animated lead designer Donald Mustard. "Innovative big changes always seem to come from smaller no-name developers because they have something to prove – and that's us."

It might seem to be jumping the gun slightly to make such vaulting proclamations, seeing as *Advent Rising*

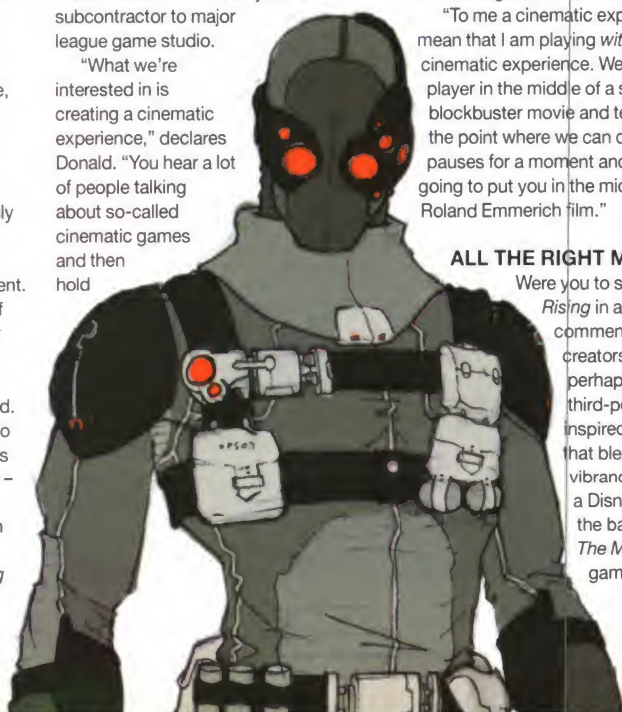
has been in full production for less than a year, but the lads at GlyphX appear ambitious to the point of embarrassment. Having been labouring for the best part of a decade on other people's games, they're keen to strike out and make a bold transformation from anonymous subcontractor to major league game studio.

"What we're interested in is creating a cinematic experience," declares Donald. "You hear a lot of people talking about so-called cinematic games and then hold

The Warhammer is a massive four-wheeled assault vehicle.

"Innovative big changes always seem to come from smaller, no-name developers, and that's us"

DONALD MUSTARD
LEAD DESIGNER



up *Metal Gear Solid 2* as a kind of example for all to follow. Like, what's so cinematic about a top-down isometric game you play for ten minutes and then watch a ten-minute cut-scene? Yeah, the little movies are beautiful, but that doesn't make the game cinematic..."

"To me a cinematic experience would mean that I am playing *within* that cinematic experience. We want to put the player in the middle of a summer blockbuster movie and technology is at the point where we can do that." He pauses for a moment and smiles. "We're going to put you in the middle of a good Roland Emmerich film."

ALL THE RIGHT MOVIES

Were you to see *Advent Rising* in action without commentary from its creators you would perhaps assess it as a third-person, *Halo*-inspired space opera that blends the vibrancy and colour of a Disney movie with the balletic combat of *The Matrix*. The game's reluctant

Q&A

DONALD MUSTARD



We turn up the heat on the lead designer of *Advent Rising*, gently grilling him about working with famed sci-fi author Orson Scott Card. (If you didn't know already, the Cardster was so impressed with GlyphX's vision that he agreed to adapt a full script for the game.)

PCZ Why did you decide to look for a published writer to work with you?

DM We just thought it would be really awesome if we could bring in someone who understood character development, who understood writing dialogue. Someone who could take what we had done and could really turn it into something special.

PCZ We know he's no stranger to the games industry (his credits include *Loom*, *Star Control*, *Monkey Island* and *The Dig*), but how come Orson Scott Card ended up topping the shortlist?

DM We're all huge Orson Scott Card fans – we've all read *Ender's Game* and many of his other books. One of the things he's the master of is being able to concisely convey emotion, so that in one or two sentences you will either love or hate something – it's that conciseness that's perfect for videogames.

PCZ So how did you get in touch?

DM He was in Utah doing a book signing and he gave us half an hour of his time. So we sat down and made our pitch. Several hours later he looks across at us and says, "Well, you guys don't need me. This game is going to be huge with or without me, and that's exactly why I'll work on it." It was sweet.

PCZ What's his role on the game?

DM He's doing all the dialogue and writing the novels that will be released with the game, and also the movie scripts. He's going to be there when we do all the casting for the voice-overs and he's going to sit with us poring over every single line as it's recorded, so that every word is read as he wrote it.

PCZ So with books and movies already lined up, do you have any big name actors lined-up to fill the role of Gideon? Wil Wheaton perhaps?

DM Er... we'll have to wait and see.

hero Gideon Wyeth appears every bit how one would imagine Neo if he were to defect to Disney, even down to the tight black tee and wet-look barnet.

Advent Rising borrows heavily and unashamedly from other influences too: the young hero with dormant powers and a destiny to challenge the galactic order smacks of *Star Wars*, yet the background history that colours *Advent Trilogy* could have easily been conceived as an antidote to the smugness of *Star Trek*.

"The thrust of the story," explains Donald, "is that as advanced alien races gained interstellar travel, they found that

BATTLEFIELD RISING

MULTIPLAYER ISN'T LOCKED DOWN YET, BUT GLYPHX ALREADY HAS SOME BIG IDEAS...

Despite being conceived and developed originally for PC, sadly, it looks like *Advent Rising* will be prepped for a console lead. As with *Halo*, this will mean that the extra PC development time will be spent devising some serious multiplayer mayhem (and the wait for the PC version will, we're assured, be months rather than years). Of course GlyphX are keeping their plans close to their chests but it seems that the boys are keen to go one better than *Halo*.

"We play a lot of *Counter-Strike* and we play a lot of *Battlefield 1942*," enthuses lead designer Donald Mustard. "If there were to be a multiplayer mode, it would very much be in the vein of *Battlefield 1942* but on a much bigger scale. *Advent Rising* takes place in the middle of a galactic war after all."



A massive-scale vehicle-based space war in the vein of *BF1942*? Cool.

"You'll evolve into a superhero, able to run on walls, run up people's bodies and send them flying"

DONALD MUSTARD
LEAD DESIGNER

Your actions and their level of success will determine the mood of the story.

they had these similar pervasive legends of these super-powered beings known as Humans. No-one had ever seen a human, no-one really believed that they even existed – they just had these legends of these mythical creatures."

"But the real reason why no one has ever seen a human is that a race called the Seekers are methodically going throughout the galaxy destroying human worlds under the guise of benevolent explorers – so they arrive in orbit around



Many of Gideon's powers would be quite at home in a *Star Wars* game.

your planet and start to do bad stuff."

Having worked with Epic in the past, it seemed only right and natural for the team to acquire a license to the latest Unreal technology, and the results are impressive. The look and feel of the game is vibrant and cartoonish, but not overly so, and certainly different from any other Unreal-based game out there.

BODY WEAPON

As for the gameplay, the emphasis is set squarely on action. Think *Jedi Knight*'s third-person Force-wielding action, *Half-Life*'s first person weaponry, *Halo*'s vehicles, *Metroid Prime*'s pace and variety and *Max Payne*'s special effects – not all kneaded and compressed into one messy ball, but cunningly intertwined to offer a range of experiences.

"In *Half-Life* you began with a crowbar and by the end you had rocket launchers and Snarks," remembers Donald. "In *Advent* you'll begin with all the weapons that you'd only get by the end of a typical

game. Instead of new weapons, it's through the gameplay that you evolve how you approach the game, in the sense that you will eventually become the weapon. You will evolve into, essentially, a superhero, which will allow you to run on walls, run up people's bodies, punch them and send them flying 50 feet through a wall."

"In giving the players a broad palette I want them to be able to play the game however they want. To encourage that, we have a system in place where the more you do something, the better you get at it. So the more you jump, the higher and longer you'll be able to jump. The more you try to levitate objects, the bigger the objects you'll eventually be able to pick up and the further you'll be able to throw them."

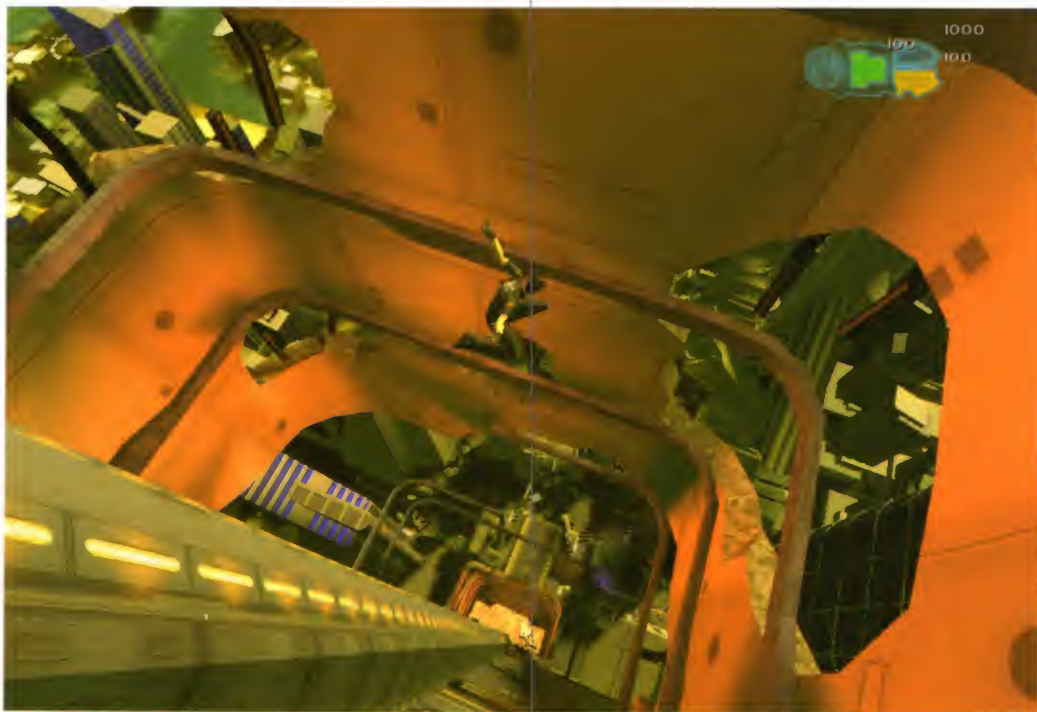
By way of example, Donald loads up a level, summons a buggy and after driving around gets out and selects the ability to lift and move objects. He picks the car up by one wheel, spins it around and hurls it impressively into a wall.

In the distance is another vehicle, a huge four-wheeled behemoth the size of a football pitch. "That's called the Warhammer," says Donald. "It has a full interior of corridors, can carry two smaller buggies and has a number of turrets you can climb in and fire from... and yes, by the end of the game you'll be able to drop it on people's heads."

DOUGHNUTTER

When you listen to him talk and watch his wild gesturing, it's difficult not to get caught up in the boyish excitement Donald exudes as he explains his ambition for GlyphX's first full game. As he enthuses about AI routines, he leaps across the room, almost sending a box of doughnuts to the floor, arms flailing and cheeks ballooning with beatbox gunfire. And in an office that lacks even the basic raw materials to make a cup of coffee – we're in Mormon country, remember – this makes a particularly profound impression.

Then Donald remembers he's at work, thanks to his colleagues hanging out office doors to see what all the kerfuffle is about, and he retreats back into a few





Gideon won't be saving mankind alone – plenty of others will muck in.

far, in terms of animation and action it looks to be spectacular and fully realised. In other areas, like pacing, narrative, interface and AI there's still much to prove. But, we have to say, we're just about convinced they can pull it off. **PC**



In a nod to *Messiah*, Gideon will be able to temporarily possess his enemies.

seconds of mild embarrassment... Until the subject of weaponry comes up, at which point he springs back into action and death animations are acted out with similar gusto.

THE CRYING GAME

"We want this game to look cool. We want a killer control system and incredible animations. But most of all we want to have an incredible story that conveys emotion and offers choices that have consequences," explains Donald. "In a movie or a cut-scene you are completely limited in the choices the director makes. In gameplay we have the ability to allow the player to write their own story to a

degree. We'll put you in situations where the choices you make will directly influence the outcome and flow of the game and the events that transpire. Ultimately the story that you experience will be dictated largely in part by the way you play the game – therefore creating a different emotional experience for each player – that's what I am primarily interested in."

"John Carmack said about *Doom III* that his primary goal is to scare people again and again for the whole game – and that's fine. But we want to evoke an entire range of emotions within the game – not just fear, but joy, pain and grief. I want people to be laughing and crying, swelling

You'll find a trailer for *Advent Rising* on this month's DVD.

with emotion, scared and full of adrenalin, while all these things are happening around them."

It's a tall order, and if they can pull it off, *Advent Rising* will mark a new highpoint for storytelling in games. Of course I was a tad dubious at the time, and it was only later, when we were discussing what games had influenced *Advent's* design, that it became clear how they planned to create and sustain an emotional fix with the player. At this point, for me at least, it all clicked:

"I feel that the death of Aerith in *Final Fantasy VII* was the definitive moment in the history of games. That was for many the best moment in the game – in any game – and we definitely have that moment, in fact we have a number of those moments that we hope will rock the way people look at games."

There's no doubt that GlyphX is working on one of the most ambitious titles we've ever seen. So



TRIPLE THREAT

IT'S A GRAND SCI-FI TRILOGY IN THE TRADITION OF GRAND SCI-FI TRILOGIES

Advent was originally conceived as three games and for the sequels the developers have some rather ambitious ideas, not least of which is the option to take your characters from one episode to the next. There will also of course be new weapons, vehicles and special powers.

"You definitely develop a lot of new powers in the sequels," announces Donald, "and the powers you've already developed will continue to evolve. Things happen in the story that change the way your powers work. In the second game, as you get more powerful you'll have the struggle of evolving too quickly. By the third game we want to have Gideon ripping mountains apart."



By the third game you'll be truly godlike.



EA has used the likenesses of all the actors' faces, though likenesses of their hands and groins were not as easy to come by...

And the Oscar goes to...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

The game of the film of the book is coming to PC. We gave *Steve Hill* a ring

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER EA Redwood Shores
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE www.lordoftherings.eagames.com
ETA November 7, 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Footage from some film
- Actual locations from some film
- Comes out before some film
- New co-operative mode

CV

EA

EA REDWOOD SHORES

The biggest player in the business, Electronic Arts boasts a string of internal development teams, primarily based in the US. The largest of these, known as EA Redwood Shores, is located in Redwood City, California, on the same site as EA's corporate HQ. With about 200 employees on site, EARS works mainly on the *Bond*, *Tiger Woods* and *Lord Of The Rings* franchises. Here's a snippet of its recent output

2001 *James Bond 007: Agent Under Fire*. A console FPS with *Bond* in it. Incidentally, *007: Nightfire* was developed by Gearbox, not EA.

2002 *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers*. EA's first big *Lord* game didn't make it to PC because there just wasn't time to squeeze it in before the film. It was quite the hack 'n' slash hit on PS2 though.

2003 *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004*. Coming soon to a PC near you.

WITH PETER Jackson's celebrated *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy set to reach its climax this Christmas, PC gamers could have been forgiven for feeling a little aggrieved. Whereas EA flooded the consoles with its take on *The Two Towers*, the PC was harshly neglected, despite surely being the most obvious market for all things bearded. So while console owners got to mince around as Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli, beating several shades of shit out of the residents of Middle Earth, the PC remained as barren as a New Zealand desert. Admittedly, we did get Vivendi's hasty cash-in *Fellowship Of The Ring* – based on the book, not the film – but it was a largely shoddy affair that did little to justify the licence. This time round, EA has done the right thing, and *The Return Of The King* will receive a cross-platform release this November, a good six weeks before the film hits the screen.

Therefore, keen gamers will already be familiar with many of the scenes before they load up on popcorn and bed in at

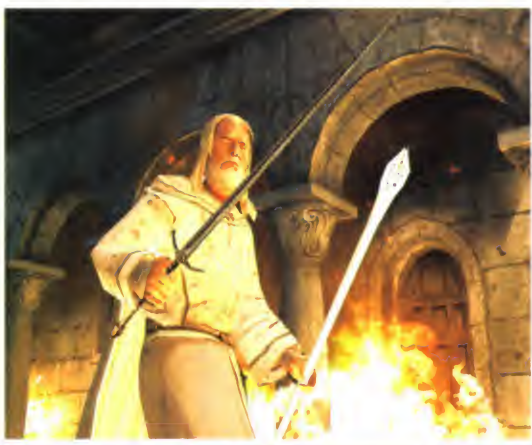
their local cinema for the final instalment. Not only will the game feature actual – and unseen – footage from the film, but the environments are also taken directly from it. As such, you'll be able to convincingly explore the Paths of the Dead, defend Minas Tirith, and battle Sauron's forces at the Pelennor Fields before final confrontations at the Black Gate and the Crack of Doom. EA has clearly invested a great deal in the licence, something that has guaranteed the game's development team near unprecedented levels of access to the property. This extends as far as the digital assets, as well as voice-overs from the actual actors, and the haunting score composed by Oscar-winner Howard Shore.

LOOK WHO'S TOLKIEN

The authenticity of *Return Of The King* isn't in question. What PC owners will be looking forward to discovering is how the undeniably rich universe has been fashioned into a game. Essentially a third-person action/adventure affair, the



Oh great, that's ruined the film for me then.



Expect all new levels of misery and despair.



He moves fast for a fat lad.

CO-OPERATION STREET

EA THROWS DOWN THE MULTIPLAYER GAUNTLET

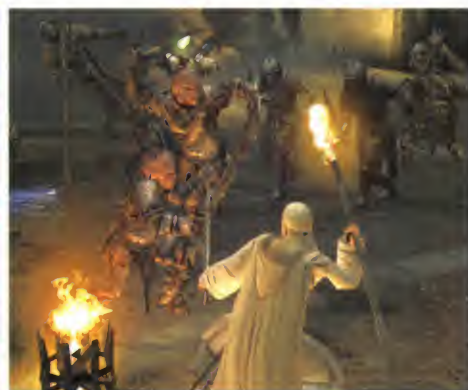
If you're old enough to remember pissing away hundreds of pence in the arcades playing *Gauntlet*, then *Return Of The King*'s new co-operative mode may be very exciting indeed. If you don't remember it, *Gauntlet* was a pioneering multiplayer experience in which up to four players simultaneously battled through a series of dungeons, ostensibly working together, yet proving inordinately selfish when it came to sharing out the food rations. The co-op mode in *Return Of The King* will work in a vaguely similar fashion, enabling you and a friend to play through the game hand in hand, as it were. The array of characters available will also make for a great deal of variety, offering a large number of different pairings, some of which will inevitably be more effective than others. And unlike *Gauntlet*, you won't have to squabble over food.



The resemblance is uncanny.



Bloody goths...



Cast a spell you great ninny.

gameplay will incorporate multiple character paths for each member of the Fellowship. And in contrast to the limited number of characters in *The Two Towers*, this time there will be a total of nine playable and unlockable characters, including Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, Gimli, Sam, and Frodo, all looking the part, and of course sounding the part thanks to the involvement of internationally famous film stars.

More than mere hideous replicas, the characters will be able to get stuck into the action in an impressive fashion, interacting with the environments during both melee and ranged combat. As well as punching enemies hard in the face and wielding great big swords, characters will also have the ability to jump and swing from ropes, fire catapults, kick boulders and tweak armpit hair (one of these may

not be true). And as is becoming increasingly fashionable, multi-directional attacks will be possible, along with a variety of combos that should help to slay such boss monsters as Shelob, the Witch King, and of course the Dark Lord Sauron in the final showdown.

TOLKIEN 'BOUT A REVOLUTION

While the emphasis is clearly on action, there will also be some adventure elements and even an RPG-lite system whereby characters can gain new combat attacks, new skills, and weapon upgrades. And although it's not shaping up to be a radical departure from *The Two Towers*, it will be a bigger game, boasting one extra level for a total of 14, all of which promise to be larger than in the previous title. The AI has also had an overhaul, and should be a lot more robust, with multiple attacks making for a more challenging experience.

We've recently been to Redwood City to see the game in action, and have to confess to coming away mildly impressed. On the surface, the gameplay seems to largely consist of clubbing enemies about the head and neck, but we're assured that greater depth will become apparent during extended play. Visually, there can be few quibbles, despite the console origins, with the PC version boasting the obligatory high resolution graphics.

EA certainly seems to be making the most of its lucrative licence, and we have to say it looks just like the films. Except smaller. **EA**

"While the emphasis is clearly on action, there will also be some adventure elements and even an RPG-lite system"



You can always rely on FIFA to produce good player likenesses.



Make an off-the-ball run into space ready for a through ball.



Lead your team to glory in the Career mode.



Couldn't stop a pig in a corridor like that.

Death, taxes, and... FIFA 2004

What do Canadians know about football?
Steve Hill travelled to Vancouver to find out



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER EA Sports
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
WEBSITE www.fifa2004.ea.com
ETA Autumn 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The world's biggest gaming franchise is back
- New Off-The-Ball control system
- New Career mode
- Play online for the first time



"EA's big shouting point is the new Off The Ball control system"



fact that at lunchtime the goalposts were shifted to make way for a five-a-side frisbee contest. In fact, during PC ZONE's day at EA Canada we didn't see a single football. What we did see was *FIFA 2004*. Hours and hours of it – at one point racking up an impressive 5-0 scoreline against a hapless journalist from a rival publication, before the game crashed (again).

The code clearly has a long way to go before it can be considered playable, but changes are afoot. EA's big shouting point this year is the new Off The Ball control system, whereby – as the name suggests – you take control of a player off the ball and attempt to take up a decent position to receive it. In single-player mode, the camera even swings round behind the man on the ball, with up-field players denoted by different joypad buttons. Press the button of your preferred man and you're away. Confused? Think of the man on the ball as the quarterback in American football; indeed, the system seems to have been lifted directly from EA's *Madden* series.

SENSIBLE SOCCER

Elsewhere, we're mildly excited by the new Career mode, which if implemented correctly could bring back the magic of *Sensible World Of Soccer*. For the first time, lower division clubs are included (alas, no

Conference), and it should be possible to take a team from misery to respectability over the course of a few seasons. *FIFA 2004* will also be compatible with *Total Club Manager*. So, for instance, if you've reached a Cup Final in *TCM*, you'll be able to actually import your team into *FIFA*, play the game, and the result will stand.

HEAD TO HEAD

And if you prefer playing against humans, the online mode will facilitate this, even letting you bark insults at your unseen opponent using a headset. As well as friendly games, EA is hoping to organise online knock-out competitions, with cash prizes being mooted. The online function will also provide downloadable content and updated squads and kits, and you'll even be able to decorate your home stadium with flags and banners.

There are clearly some excellent ideas being crammed into *FIFA* this year. We can only pray they get the gameplay right. **PCZ**





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<http://uk.worldcybergames.org>

or visit any **GAME** store.





Tolkien stalwarts like the Balrog spice up some familiar RTS scenarios.



It's all gone a bit Warcraft.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Liquid Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.vugames.com
ETA Christmas 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's *Lord Of The Rings*
- Same developers as the excellent *Battle Realms*
- Automatically adjusts difficulty level to your ability
- Storyline that branches away from the plot of the films
- Control all your favourite LOTR characters

NO IT'S NOT what you think. Yes, you, you filthy animal. In fact, let me set the record straight right now about what to expect from this game. What you definitely won't be seeing in *War Of The Ring* is Legolas mounting Gimli from behind like a bull and using the bearded midget's whiskers as hairy reins to gain maximum leverage, while Aragorn holds him still and shouts, "Squeal you dwarven piggy bitch." What you will be seeing however, is a 3D isometric RTS based around Tolkien's epic *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy, developed by Liquid Entertainment, the brains behind the excellent eastern-flavoured RTS *Battle Realms*.

Aimed more at the strategy newcomer than the veteran, *War Of The Ring* is set to branch away from the storyline of the books and films, and throw you into missions that develop the trilogy's back-story. So, you can expect to be tasked with navigating Gimli and his dwarven brethren through orc-infested mountains as they make their way to Rivendell, and battle through forests teeming with giant spiders in an attempt to track down that bug-eyed schizoid Gollum. You'll even

It's gonna hurt...

WAR OF THE RING

Ring-mania reaches new heights as Tolkien's trio spawns an RTS.

Martin Korda searches for his one true ring



Early sections see you hacking through dozens of giant spiders.

be able to play on the side of evil, though this option is yet to be unveiled.

WHIPPED INTO SHAPE

We got our grubby claws on an early build of the game this issue, and while the graphics proved far from spectacular, the

gameplay was fast, uncomplicated and very easy to master. Not only is the interface simpler than a dropped-at-birth chimp, there's little to no tactical musing required to win a level, very much in contrast to *Battle Realms*. Several characters from the movies make an

appearance early in the piece, including the aforementioned forehead-on-legs Gollum and mop-topped Legolas, as well as several vicious Cave Trolls. Best of all, though, is the Balrog, which minces up its opponents with a giant flaming whip.

MISSION NOT SO IMPOSSIBLE

Apparently, the finished game will judge how good a player you are and adapt the difficulty accordingly, so it won't matter if you're a bit cack-handed. There's also a variety of mission types in place – some involve surviving only the units given to you at the outset, while others provide more complex base-building tasks. We've even been promised a Helm's Deep level, which could give the game some much needed magnitude, as it's currently feeling a little on the thin side.

When we saw this game four months ago at the VU Games conference in Berlin, one candid insider described it as 'a shit on a stick'. Luckily, since then it's improved almost beyond all recognition. Due out just in time for the Christmas rush (and the hysteria that'll accompany the next film, *Return Of The King*), there's another five months left to polish this game, and with an Evil campaign yet to be revealed and an all new LOTR back-story, it's more than possible this could end up being a very solid and entertaining RTS. **EW**

"Best of all is the Balrog, which minces its opponents with a giant flaming whip"



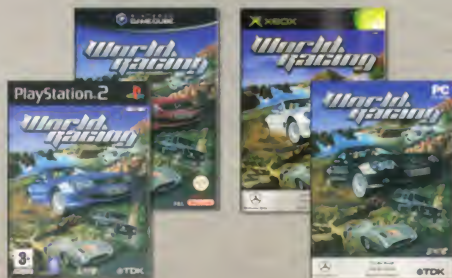
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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a gold sequined top and matching shorts, stands centrally. She is surrounded by numerous floating electronic gadgets, including mobile phones, MP3 players, and digital cameras, all rendered in a light yellow/gold color. The background is a solid bright yellow.

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All aboard the gravy train...

RAILROAD TYCOON III

As this second sequel steams ahead, *Paul Presley* plays the fat controller and checks out the timetable

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER PopTop Software
PUBLISHER Gathering
WEBSITE www.poptop.com
ETA October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Now in whizzo 3D
- Dynamic economy makes hauling goods more realistic than ever
- Worlds are four times bigger than before
- Leaves on the line!

TRAINS! [Aaargh! – A Reader.]

No, don't be scared. Your credibility with the local gangsta posse isn't about to take a bigger nosedive than a NASA Shuttle pilot. No one's actually asking you to pretend to be a train driver or to stand on a platform at High Wycombe and jot down train numbers. This is the high-flying (sorry, mixing my metaphors there) world of corporate management, a world where the pen is mightier than the sword and the accountant is king. Set in the world of chuffa-chuffs. Maybe you'd better keep your head down for a while after all.

Railroad Tycoon is the granddaddy of the interminable succession of Tycoon games that plague us like a biblical, er, plague. Except this particular series has always had a little more class than games



The 3D world makes good planning of your routes more important than ever.

"This third incarnation is a sequel in the true sense – bigger, better and in 3D"

such as *Airport Tycoon*, *Ski Resort Tycoon* and *Local Late-Nite Kebab & Chippie Tycoon*. "It's a strategy game and it looks nice," says Franz J Felsl, lead designer at PopTop Software, with mock incredulity, "as opposed to most which go, 'It's a strategy game, here's your spreadsheet.'"

SELL-BY DATE

The series began in the hands of strategy design guru Sid Meier, and along with its sequel has been one of the most successful strategy management series not dealing with football. This third

incarnation is a sequel in the true sense – bigger, better and in 3D. "We're trying to fix a lot of the problems that people didn't like previously," explains Felsl. "Plus physically our worlds are about four times as detailed as *RT2*, which means there's about four times as much stuff to actually do."

The really important improvement is taking place under the engine plate (ho ho, do you see?), in the area of dynamic real-world economics. Sexy, I know. "This time round all the commodities travel around themselves," enthuses Felsl. "They don't do a very good job of it though and they won't make much money by themselves, but all industries that exist produce something otherwise they won't have existed at all. That's a complete departure from *RT2*. All cargo in the game wants to go someplace and it will look for the place that will pay it the most."

The dynamics between commodities have been upgraded along with the trains. Goods have far wider uses than before, making it easier for

newcomers to find profitable routes. The world evolves at a greater rate too, with the new 3D engine showing off the growth and fall of prosperous or profitless locations, almost eliminating the need to ever look at a spreadsheet ever again.

STEAMING ON

And then there are the trains. Ah, the trains. What can one say? Well, they're very train-like. All your favourites are there – from the Norris 4-2-0 to the 4-6-6-4 Challenger – from the steam era to the modern day, all behaving with real-world physics. Then there are the stock markets, corporate shenanigans, construction issues and multiplayer options to worry about. In fact, everything you *Railroad Tycoon* fans could ever have hoped for. But this time with graphics. [A]



Choo-woo! Chuffa-chuffa-chuffa...



Look closely and you can see the driver enjoying a sandwich.





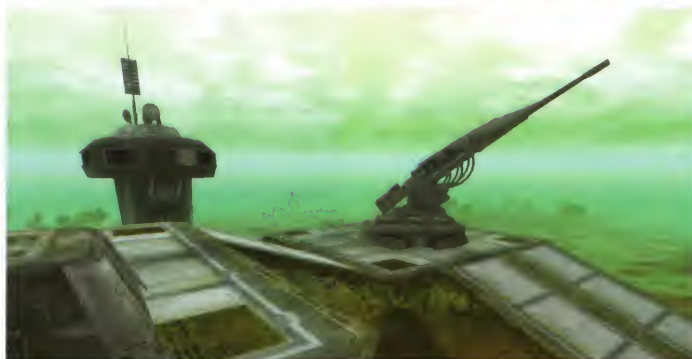
The units designs offer plenty of variety.



Unlike the first game, you can call down reinforcements from time to time.



Wherever you go, burning wastelands will surely follow.



Capturing and holding key strategic points is crucial.

Major Zone to...

GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS

CV

MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Founded by Martin Walfisz in 1997, the company has grown to a team of more than 30 talented individuals. *Ground Control 2* is their second major product, though they also develop a range of mobile phone games

1999 *Ground Control* is released to massive critical acclaim.

2000 *Dark Conspiracy*, the first and only expansion pack for *Ground Control*, picks up the story where the original left off, adding a third race to the already explosive mix.

2000 *Rosemond Valley Department Store*, a kids' management game, is released to no critical acclaim whatsoever, and proves to be little more than a financial stopgap between *Ground Control* and its sequel.

Martin Korda flew over to Shweeden to get to gripsh with thish 3D RTSh shequel

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.groundcontrol2.com
ETA Christmas 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- All new jaw-dropping 3D engine
- No resource collecting
- Fully tactical terrain
- Compelling plot
- Incredible cinematic sequences

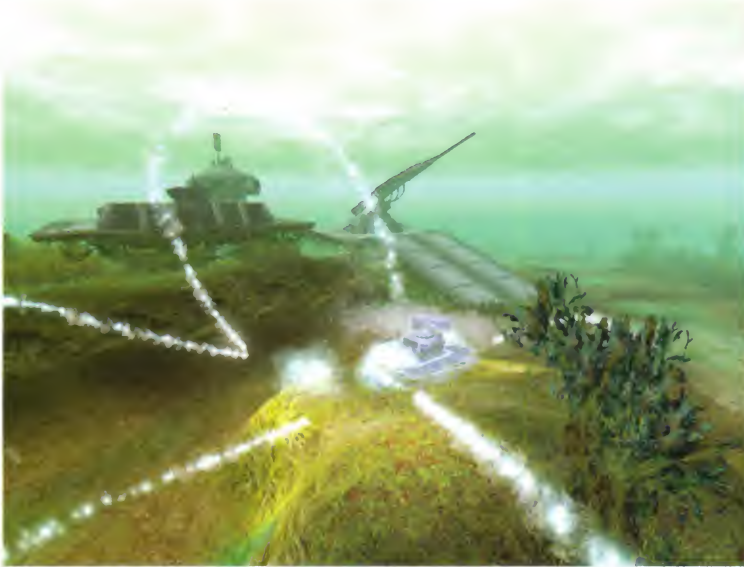
THREE YEARS ago, the RTS was beached on the sandbanks of its own success, a once-proud beast fading away after a golden era of prosperity. Blighted by a dearth of originality and an abundance of sub-standard isometric *Command & Conquer* clones, the genre was in chaos, constantly spewing out the same ideas until they were more regurgitated than a bulimic's dinner.

But then something changed. In the space of four revolutionary months, the world of RTS gaming was given a new infusion of life, morphing almost beyond recognition. After a tentative start, the 3D RTS finally raised its head and began its journey to prominence with three titanic titles appearing in as many months: *Shogun: Total War*, *Earth 2150* and the sensational futuristic war-sim *Ground*

Control. But while the first two of these 3D behemoths have received makeovers in the forms of sequels and stand-alone expansion packs, the second instalment of *Ground Control* has been conspicuous by its absence. Until now.

SWEDISH BEAUTIES

On a not-so-sunny day in Sweden, I visited developers Massive Entertainment, the collective brain behind the multi-award winning first game. Clearly, they're quite chuffed with what they've managed to achieve with their new project, and it's not hard to see why. The game is powered by a sublime new engine, capable of rendering visuals detailed enough to grace an FPS, and it's being pushed right to its limits in *Ground Control 2*.



Ground Control 2 features some of the meatiest explosions ever.



Zoom into the action and you'll see just how stunning the visuals are.



Get tanked up.



Terrain is fully tactical.

Set 200 years after the cessation of the hostilities of the first game, *Ground Control 2* is set to offer even larger and more diverse missions than its predecessor, without losing the sense of immediacy that furnished GC with such a unique character. "We want the player to feel as though they're really on the battlefield," explained Henrik Sebring, the game's design director, as he panned around a spectacular battle with the free-roaming camera. He was commanding a crescent of tanks, brimming with infantry units as they advanced on an enemy ion cannon. They were meeting stiff resistance from a squad of enemy foot soldiers, who were utilising their elevated vantage point to great effect. "Just like *Ground Control*, the terrain will all be tactical," beamed Henrik, as he used some dense foliage to conceal a flanking party he'd sent out to surprise the enemy. Clearly, he'd played this one before.

DROPPING OFF

CEO and founder of the company Martin Walfisz, keen to point out some of the game's new features, saw his chance as Henrik lost himself in the game. While he was finding his way back, Martin proceeded to talk us through some of GC2's nuances.

First off, resource management. Once again there isn't any, with the emphasis purely on the action, strategy and conquest. However, whereas you

had to make do with the units you began each mission with in *Ground Control*, *Operation Exodus* boasts a rather different approach when it comes to unit selection. "There are tactical locations on the map. When you capture these you acquire more Acquisition Points. These APs are used to call down more troops," explained Martin. Showing us how this works, he stormed a hill, capturing it with ease with some highly effective pincer tactics. The APs started wracking up. "When you have enough APs, you can call down a dropship carrying your choice of reinforcements. The dropships are like a player's base. You can configure your dropship to be a monster support weapon, or maybe a stealth ship too."

But what about the AI? "We want the AI to surprise you. It concentrates on using the battlefield to its advantage and setting up ambushes," beamed Martin. Fair enough, but in order for an RTS to recreate the visceral feel of a real battlefield, the AI also needs to react realistically to your attacks. Martin feels confident Massive has that cracked too. "The more firepower you put on a unit, the more they become suppressed. They will have to hunch down, so they can't return fire so easily."

After the presentation we were ushered into a room to have a go ourselves, while the whole development team gathered round to watch. Despite the similarities, GC2 feels very different from the original, with sprawling maps giving rise to isolated

WISH UPON A NORTHERN STAR

WHEN YOUR RACE IS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION, THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO

It's 2741 on the planet of Morning Star Prime, the home world of the peace loving Northern Star Alliance (not an airline loyalty scheme). It's been 200 years since the last war, and quite frankly everyone's got a little bit too comfortable. A bit porky, a bit lazy, a bit wimpy. So when the merciless Terran Empire decides to pay a visit and enslave the entire population, the future of the NSA starts to look a little bleak.

That's where you come in. As Captain Jacob Angelus, you must lead the counter-attack against the superior enemy forces, in a story-driven campaign that will see you searching for the one thing that can save your planet (cue hackneyed ancient alien artefact so powerful it could turn the tide of the whole war).

Massive has hinted that a third race may well come into the equation at some point too, but otherwise they're remaining tight-lipped about the plot, which, incidentally, will be unravelled by both in-engine cut-scenes and stunning pre-rendered cinematics. It's a storyline that the team believes will be the best ever seen in an RTS. Needless to say, we'll be the judges of that.



That's you, that is.

"We want the AI to surprise you. It concentrates on using the battlefield to its advantage and setting up ambushes"

MARTIN WALFISZ
CEO, MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

battles all around the level rather than in just one place. There are many more vehicles this time around too, with an array of buggies, APCs, tanks, helicopter and futuristic giant robots all at your disposal.

SOLDIER, SOLDIER

In fact, it's all looking very impressive, and the only major concerns at this stage are a clumsy camera control interface and a preoccupation by some of your soldiers to get lost behind trees, making them hard to see or command in the heat of a firefight. Fear not though, as Massive still has plenty of development time in hand.

So, should you be getting excited then? A quick squint at the sci-fi 3D RTS horizon shows little else (apart from *Homeworld 2*) to get the heart-rate going, proving just how far ahead of the field Massive Entertainment is with *Operation Exodus*. And having done the RTS genre such a favour a few years back, and by building on rather than replicating its winning formula, it deserves to have another hit game. And from the looks of things, *Ground Control 2* could well be it. **[E]**



Poor Rusty, he was a good old boy, until he got the taste for human flesh.



All the fun of the fair.



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER KCET
PUBLISHER Konami
WEBSITE www.konami-europe.com/silenthill3
ETA October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The *Silent Hill* series is the best and classiest survival-horror franchise out there
- All new characters and more coherent storyline
- Disturbing new array of wobbly meat creatures
- Stunningly creepy graphics

STILL STUCK FOR a summer holiday destination? Why not consider *Silent Hill*? The quiet, mist-filled streets, the solitude, the unique native fauna – it's the perfect place to get away from it all. Accommodation is never an issue with the wide selection of abandoned asylums and derelict tenements, and for your health concerns there's always a nurse close at hand.



What do you make of that Dr Freud?

Horror, thy name is...

SILENT HILL 3

Holidays From Hell eat your heart out. Anthony Holden heads back to Silent Hill for another sanity-stretching bloodbath

With a helping crowbar and a stitched up piece of meat for a face.

OK, so maybe it's not for everyone. But when we were invited to return to the entrail-smeared world of *Silent Hill* for a preview of the third horror-racked outing, we practically jumped out of our skins and made mobiles out of them at the chance.

Silent Hill 3 has been out on PS2 for a few months now, but it's almost ready for the PC, and going by the 99 per cent complete code we've been playing in the office, it's going to be just as good as its magnificently macabre predecessors.

FEAR AND FILTH

The first thing that's noticeable about the new game is that it follows very much in the footsteps of *Silent Hill 2*. The feel of the game is essentially the same, the visual style identical – you even visit some of the same locations later in the piece, including (eventually) *Silent Hill* itself.

And in a way this is a good thing. The creators of the series are by now hugely adept at scaring the living Jesus out of us, and know exactly which buttons to push. The crackling radio, the claustrophobic camera angles, the increasingly disturbing

locations – the whole thing creates a superb feeling of unease, frequently overflowing into sheer panic.

On the other hand, some of the devices used in the series are becoming a little too familiar. Dismembered mannequins, deformed zombie nurses, mix and match hell-demons of rusted metal and sausage meat. It's brilliantly disquieting, but at risk of losing its impact with long-time fans.

Fortunately, *SH3* has taken a very new direction in terms of storyline. The insipid James Sunderland is gone, replaced by Heather, a pretty young thing more accustomed to hanging round malls than zombies. An early encounter suggests she is part of an ominous-sounding doomsday prophecy, laying the groundwork for a far

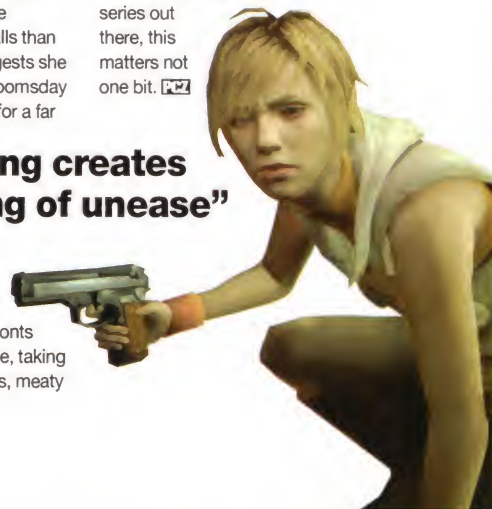
torsos with spinning death-blade arms and bloated humanoid pus-sacks. In terms of weaponry, your arsenal now stretches to a samurai sword and submachine gun.

However, despite such improvements, detractors of the genre will have plenty to moan about. The survival horror formula is still in effect, with the same clunky combat system, the same glaringly obvious puzzles, and the same old tricks for scaring us. But for the truly initiated, who understand why *Silent Hill* is the best, classiest and most disturbing horror series out there, this matters not one bit. **CB**

"The whole thing creates a superb feeling of unease"

more substantial plotline than the inscrutable *Silent Hill 2*.

The array of hideous, nameless monstrosities that confronts Heather is also far more impressive, taking in mummified dogs with cleft faces, meaty



NOW LARA SOUNDS
AS HOT AS SHE LOOKS

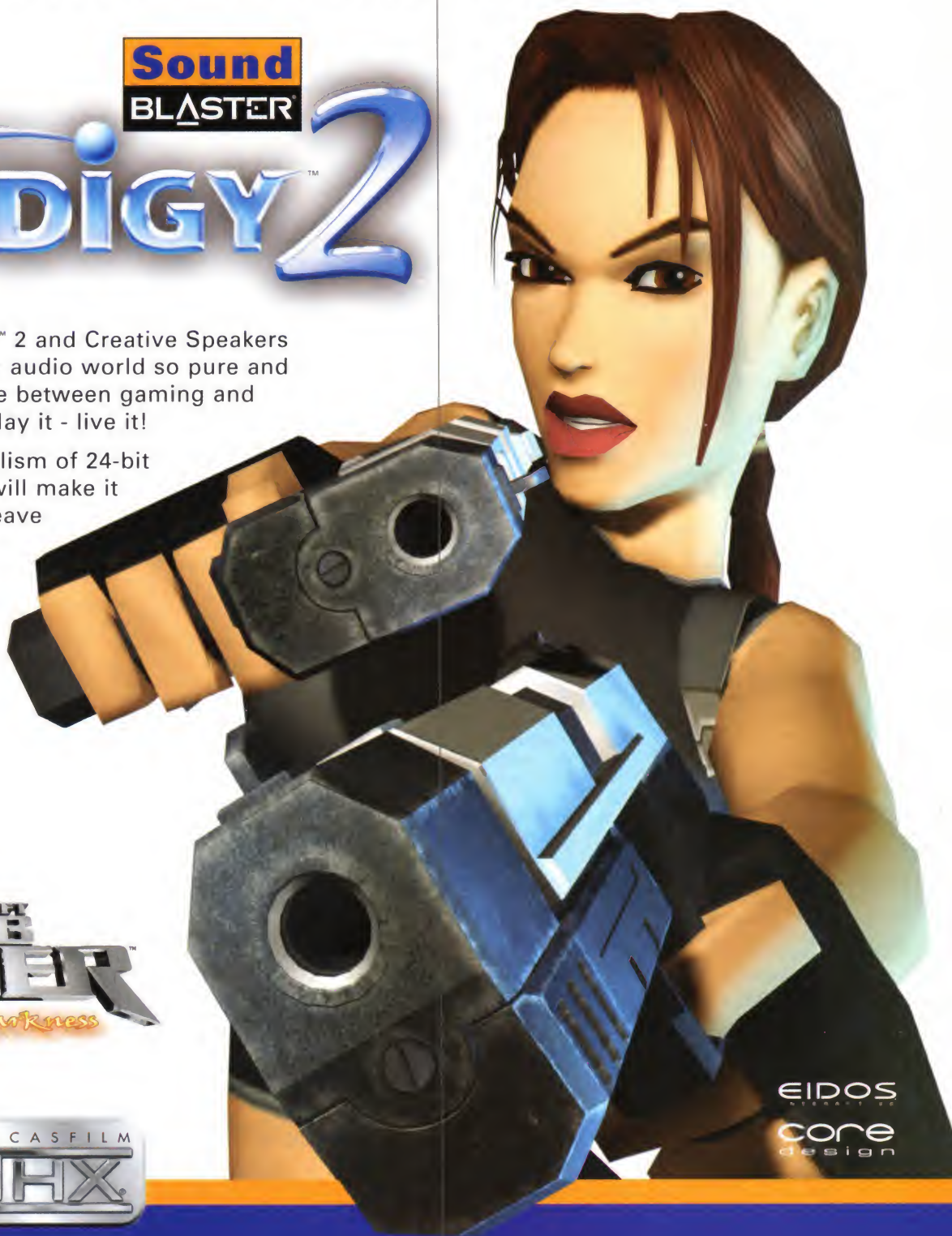
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RAIDER
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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

DARK SIDE OF THE ZONE



■ SENIOR REVIEWS ED Martin Korda

▲ This month, the ZONE office has been a den of opulent over-indulgence, all in the name of bringing you the finest PC games mag on the market. At least, that's our excuse.

It all started with a 12 hour drinking session to ascertain how alcohol influences a person's playing ability (page 28), and concluded in a late-night gambling extravaganza at a casino, to see how the experience compares to casino-bases games (page 90).

However, life has a way of evening the score. A darker, far more sinister power was at work, weaving its corrupting energy through our very own Anthony Holden, morphing him into a cackling maniac. As deadline loomed, his sneering outbursts coloured the air with disgusting language (bum, poo, etc), and his blood-curdling screams of evil sent shivers down our spines.

This man, this creature, had become unrecognisable from his former self, more machine than human. Taking the dark side route through the stunning *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (page 64) can do that to a man.

But redemption came at the last moment. With his review unwritten and the issue seemingly lost, we cut off one of his arms during a titanic battle featuring umbrellas, staplers and a bottle opener. We then strapped him to a chair with Bluetaq and made him watch Bambi 362 times in order to inject some wholesome goodness back into him. Eventually, the old Ant returned, bravely bashing out the review with his one remaining hand and a stick attached to his forehead.

He's been a new man ever since, and now spends three nights a week helping underprivileged children at our local community centre. Rumours that he's been beating them up for their pocket money, however, are totally unfounded.



Is the Force strong in this one, or has it succumbed to the dark side? Find out on a page, not so far, far away (page 64)

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make then please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our top-end rig, the Area-51 from Alienware.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy



JAMIE SEFTON

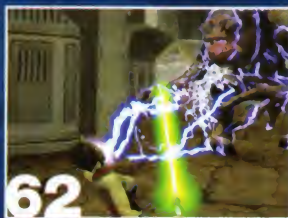
Star Wars pinball games and *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*

What are you currently playing?

When did you realise your journey to the dark side was complete?

When I found myself taking photos of fat Americans at E3.

When I went to my first Leeds United match at the age of ten.



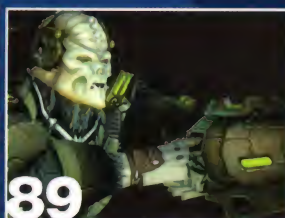
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JK: JEDI ACADEMY
Use the force



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Older games at new prices



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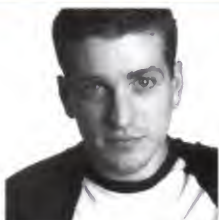
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MARTIN KORDA

Championship Manager 4 and Counter-Strike V1.6

I'll never turn to the dark side. I WON'T. NEVER! Oh, all right, how much?



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy and Silent Hill 3

When I got expelled from Sunday school, aged five.



PAUL PRESLEY

MS Flight Sim 2004 and MoH: Allied Assault

The day I gave up freelancing.



WILL PORTER

Half-Life, Indiana Jones and the Fate Of Atlantis

Porter's a good boy really.



STEVE HILL

The Great Escape

After my first press trip.



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

A Tale In The Desert

During the humiliating Best of British photo shoot.



"Yes, give in to your anger, Rancor! With each passing moment, you make yourself more my servant! Ah, or failing that, we could always talk about this..."

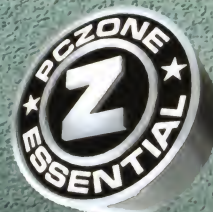
STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

■ £39.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Raven Games | ETA: September 19

www.lucasarts.com/products/jediacademy

REQUIRES: PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES: P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

He's twisted and evil, more machine than man, but Anthony Holden is going back to Jedi School in the most saber-iffic Star Wars game yet



INPERSPECTIVE

MAX PAYNE

Reviewed issue 107, Score 90%
It's getting a bit long in the tooth now, but this slow-mo bullet-fest is still one of the best third-person action games around.

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

Reviewed issue 131, Score 74%
Apparently, some people prefer Star Trek to Star Wars. In which case, *Elite Force II* provides some solid, yet rather predictable FPS action.

STAR WARS. We love it still, despite manifold betrayals and travesties and Holiday Specials and weak marketing gimmicks, and the fact that the Ewoks were meant to be Wookiees but they weren't 'cuddly' enough, and then Boba Fett turned out to be a Kiwi and he was all like: "what's the metter Ded?" And of course there was Jar Jar and *Super Bombad Racing*,

not to mention that little turd who played Anakin in *Episode One* – as well as all that lovey-dovey crap in *Episode Two* –

"Of course, we all wanted to be Jedis when we were kids"

and the fact that George Lucas has clearly lost the plot. Yeah, we love it. In the most angry, bitter way possible.

The reason we still love it is, of course, because we all wanted to be Jedis when we were kids, and we still secretly

think there's a chance we might be, if only we could stop thinking about tits all the time and focus on the Force.

Sadly, this is, at best, improbable. But don't despair, because by a remarkable stroke of good fortune the third game in the excellent *Jedi Knight* series has just turned up, and it's the closest thing yet to being a proper real-life Jedi.

Dubbed *Jedi Academy*, the new game is set not long after *Return Of The Jedi*, picking up round about where the



It's surprisingly good despite the aging Quake III engine.



Stormtroopers, even flying ones, become mere target practice when you're a fully-fledged Jedi.



Good to see he's still getting work, even if it's just a cameo.

preceding game (2002's *Jedi Outcast*) left off. For those that missed it, the last installment cast you as recurring hero Kyle Katarn – the most bearded of all the Jedi – as he struggled with his inner demons, overcame them, rejoined the Jedi brotherhood and saved the galaxy for a second time. In something of a departure from the series, Kyle is now relegated to the

supporting cast, as you take the role of Jaden Korr, a promising young student who's achieved the incredible feat of constructing a functioning Lightsaber using only matchsticks, pipe cleaners and hobby glue.

As such, you're quickly recruited to Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy, a kind of intergalactic version of Professor X's School For

101 WAYS TO KILL A SITH

WITH FORCE POWERS, ACROBATICS, GUNS AND SABERS, THERE'S PLENTY TO KEEP YOUR DEATH LUST SATISFIED IN *JEDI ACADEMY*. HERE'S JUST A FEW OF OUR FAVOURITE ATTACK COMBINATIONS.



CLINCH AND TOSS

Once you've got Force Grip at level 2 or 3, you can hold enemies up in the air with one hand and throw your saber through their guts with the other. If that doesn't finish them off, bash them against the wall a few times – it's guaranteed to bring a smile to your day.



PUSHER MAN

One of the most useful of all Force powers, Force Push is great for knocking people off cliffs or putting them on their arses and stabbing them while they're down. As you face more powerful opponents who can block Force powers, try firing at their feet with the (undeflectable) Disruptor Rifle. When they jump to dodge it, push them to their deaths.



BATTER UP

Once you've built up your basic (neutral) powers to level 2, you can use Force Pull to yank enemies through the air, and if you time it just right, you can chop them with a saber swipe as they go by. Stormtrooper kebab, anyone?

"Luke, Chewie, C-3PO, Wedge Antilles and Boba Fett all put in an appearance"



Though special moves are a bit random, you'll feel like a master when they connect.

The Gifted, where Luke and his buddy Katarn are first attempting to repopulate the fledgling New Republic with fresh young Jedi. The Imperial Remnant is still kicking off around the galaxy, and a worrying new cult of Sith worshippers is also making itself known, so there's plenty for a plucky Padawan to do as you rush towards Knighthood.

UP TO THE HILT

But before you're thrown into the thick of things you get the chance to determine Jaden's appearance by means of a basic character design system. Select a gender, then pick from a number of mix 'n' match races, faces, torsos and legs, then hop off to the saber selection screen to choose the colour of your blade and style of your hilt. At this stage it's single sabers only, though later on in the game you'll lose your Jedi weapon and have the option of upgrading to double sabers or the saber staff, as made fashionable by Darth Maul. Until then, the options are purely cosmetic (and somewhat paltry, it has to be said), but a bit of fun nonetheless.

After this it's a quick training run to familiarise you with your abilities and then straight into the action.

Already at this stage, two things are clear. Firstly, the game is very similar to its predecessor, *Jedi Outcast*. The interface is essentially the same, with a Force meter and weapons power meter sitting opposite your health and shield meters. The control



Kyle Katarn offers air support from his X-Wing, the lazy pancer.

system is identical, and as before you automatically drop into third person when you draw your saber (though you can also manually switch perspectives at any time).

Secondly, however, these similarities can't disguise the fact that things have definitely improved since the last instalment. It looks better, there are more combat moves and Force powers, and the levels seem tighter and less meandering. What's more, you're given a choice of tasks right from the start. The game is split into three chapters of five missions each, only four of which must be completed – in any order – to progress. Each culminates in a much longer, obligatory mission with a boss battle of some sort at the end.

Jedi Academy also has a much more satisfying Star Wars feel to it than *Outcast*. Raven has pulled out all the stops to provide authenticity, and the game is positively brimming with cool Wars stuff. Luke, Chewie, C-3PO, Wedge Antilles and Boba Fett all put in an appearance. You visit classic locations like Hoth,

Tatooine, Coruscant and even Darth Vader's castle residence. You get to shoot Tie Fighters, ride speeder bikes and Tauntauns, flee from angry Hancors, topple AT-STs (though not control them, as originally mooted) and destroy hordes of Stormtroopers. Clearly, a lot of fanboy love has gone into the game, and it adds hugely to its appeal.

THE WAY OF THE SABER

The gameplay itself will also be largely familiar. Missions generally involve killing everyone and everything in sight with your weaponry and Jedi powers, though there are some basic puzzle elements as well. Needless to say, there's a wide range of conventional weapons at your disposal, including blasters, thermal detonators, trip mines, homing rockets and the good-old Wookiee Bowcaster. But as expected, it's the saber combat that is the star of this show. And this time round, there's a whole lot more of it.

Not that the saber is forced upon you as such, even though conventional weapons



The game is all about saber combat – and it's magnificent.

What's especially cool, however, is the way the light/dark powers have been designed to lure you one way or another. At the outset of each mission you get to add one level (up to a maximum of three) to a choice of eight Force powers – four dark and four light. The temptation is clearly there to go straight for the dark powers, as they offer the most instant gratification. Force Lightning, Grip and Rage are quite cool even at

level one, while Heal, Protect and Mind Trick seem like pathetic goody-goody cop-outs in comparison. However, by the time you've built up to level three, things like Mind Trick become indispensable, as you can actually brainwash weak-minded enemies into fighting alongside you as an ally for up to 30 seconds. Just as Yoda said, the dark side is quicker, easier and more seductive, but may lead to your eventual destruction.



You frequently have to tackle multiple opponents simultaneously, so careful conservation of your Force energy is vital.

only supposed disadvantage of the staff is that you can't throw it. But wait! In a stroke of genius, you can actually turn off one end of the staff and get back the basic functionality (and throwing ability) of a single-blade saber. Switching between styles in this manner is a crucial way of mixing your combat tactics and catching the (often extremely tough) opponents off guard.

LURE OF THE DARK

Force powers are also far better implemented and balanced this time out. For a start, the visual effects that accompany the powers are much improved – especially the elegant cones of distortion that now accompany Force Push and Pull. New combat manoeuvres – such as Force Pulling opponents onto your saber – are fantastic, as are some of the combination moves that can be achieved (see 101 Ways To Kill A Sith panel, opposite page).

Sadly, however, there are no totally new Force powers in the game. Five powers that were only available in multiplayer in *Jedi Outcast* are now available in the full game (Protect, Absorb, Dark Rage, Sense/Sight and Drain), but all 16 powers will be familiar to long-time fans of the series.

The level design is grand and frequently impressive.

become increasingly ineffectual as you face more powerful opponents. More to the point, the saber combat and Force powers are so bloody brilliant you'll rarely want to use anything else. There's a much wider range of special moves available, with some truly spectacular spinning, flipping and slashing combo moves opening up as your Force levels build, all accompanied by magnificent visual effects. The increased emphasis on third-person action may disappoint some FPS snobs, but for the rest of us it's good news, as the battles are far too impressive to watch from the confines of someone else's head.

The choice of different saber types and fighting styles

is also hugely significant, adding much in the way of variety and replayability. If you stick with the single saber, you get the advantage of three distinct fighting stances – fast, medium and strong – as well as the ability to throw your saber. With two sabers you get just one stance, but a fast and furious style together with the advantage of being able to throw one saber while fighting (or deflecting laser shots) with the other.

However, as far as I'm concerned both of these styles can go to hell, as I've dedicated my life to the saber staff. Offering the most spectacular set of acrobatic flips and showy spins in combination with kicks to knock an opponent flat, the

JEDIS ONLINE

RE-ENACT THE BATTLE OF ENDOR WITH JEDI ACADEMY MULTIPLAYER

The multiplayer modes in *Jedi Academy* are by and large excellent. They are also, by and large, extremely predictable, and will be instantly familiar to anyone who's played a *Quake III*-engineed game before. So, you've got Q3-style Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and CTF, you've got Q3-style bots with Q3 AI and, of course, you've got that rock-solid Q3 network coding. It's a lot more than just a *Star Wars*-themed Mod however, as the Force powers radically change the game dynamic, even in vanilla DM.

There are, however, some unique game types as well, including the intense Duel mode introduced in *Jedi Outcast*, and a new 2-on-1 Power Duel mode for the hardcore duelist. Most interesting of all, though, is the new Siege game, offering team-based, class-based, objective-based scenarios in the vein of *Enemy Territory*. The classes comprise Assault, Heavy Weapons, Demolitions, Scout (sniper), Tech and Jedi – each of which has a restricted set of weapons and one or two special items at their disposal. As a Scout, you get either a Cloaking Shield (light side) or Boba Fett-style Jetpack (dark side), while other classes get a selection of deployable shields, laser sentry cannons, Bacta (health) canisters and hovering seeker drones. Sadly, it's not as good as *Enemy Territory* (yet), suffering from a dire shortage of good maps and some typical choke-point problems, but with a bit of work it could become a solid alternative.

As usual, we'll have a full, separate online review of *Jedi Academy* as soon as some servers go live. Watch this deep space.



The team-based games are great fun, but it's familiar stuff.



You get to battle a couple of AT-STs, but not get in them, sadly.

Luckily, you actually get the chance to find out, as towards the end of the game the plot splits into two branches, and I don't think it's giving away too much to tell you that it's a light side/dark side thing. I've finished the game both ways, and both are definitely worth playing, though I must say I personally advocate the dark path – it's both more fun and twice as difficult, but crucially lets you kill a particularly

annoying incidental character. No, not Binks.

So far, it's all good in the land of Jedis then. However, just as *Academy* builds effectively on all the good aspects of *Jedi Outcast*, so too it shares some of its problems. For a start, the combat controls are a little too simple, meaning you rarely feel completely in control of the moves you enact. Sure, you can pull off some



Draining opponents of their life force is strangely satisfying.



A lot of work has been done on the Force power effects.



This level could have been a treat, but the handling is weak.

MISSSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Look at that, she clearly should have lost a leg there.

A LIGHT SABER IS NOT A TOY – SO LET THE HEADS ROLL, WHY DON'TCHA?

It's often the games you enjoy the most that suggest the most missed opportunities, as you giddily extrapolate from all the good ideas thrown at you – and with *Jedi Academy*, I've got a bunch of 'em. But seeing as most of them involve strange and unprintable new Force powers, I'll stick to just one.

It's to do with the fact that *Jedi Academy* is made by Raven, which for me means one important thing: GHOUL II technology. That's the thing they made for *Soldier Of Fortune II*, which lets you blow off limbs, explode heads and target 36 different hit zones on every enemy body. I'm not saying that such a level of gore would suit a Star Wars game, but the chance to 'neatly' dismember and decapitate people with your saber would be simply superb. As it is, you can occasionally separate someone from an arm, but the impact of all the weapons is still distinctly unsatisfying – no blood, no lopped off heads, no agonising death animations.

Presumably, the Lucas people put the stoppers on the ultraviolence, but full GHOUL technology could easily have made *JKJA* the best game ever [steady on there –Ed]. Imagine spinning and slashing your way through crowds of Stormtroopers, leaving freshly cauterised legs, arms and heads bouncing in your wake. And then force gripping a stray leg and twatting someone square in the face with it [OK, you might be onto something after all –Ed]. Absolutely brilliant.

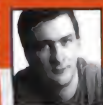
"We can categorically state this is better than *Outcast*"

amazing spinny combos with the merest click of a button, but it often seems fairly random whether you're going to actually hit anything.

Furthermore, the impact of the weapons is horribly unsatisfying, with opponents often standing unflinching as you hammer them with shot after shot. Even the saber seems ineffectual until you strike the fatal blow. For more on this, see the Missed Opportunity panel, left. The AI is also a bit weak across the board, with Stormtroopers only marginally less stupid than in *Jedi Outcast*, and only the extremely tough dark Force users (and Jedis, if you follow the dark path) displaying much in the way of brainpower.

However, these are quibbles at most, as *Jedi Academy* is still one of the most enjoyable games I've played all year. In fact, bar one or two early lapses (such as the awful speeder bike level), I loved it from beginning to end, and can categorically state that it's better than *Jedi Outcast*. Nonetheless, we're giving it a lower score. It doesn't quite scrape a PC Zone Classic, as it's a little too similar to that game, offering little that's genuinely new.

On our cover of course, we've made the controversial claim that it's the best Star Wars game ever. While this is open to debate, *Jedi Academy* is certainly the best Jedi game ever, and the one that makes you feel most like you're in



SECOND OPINION

DAVE WOODS

It's a given that Star Wars fans are going to love this game, but what about the non-believers? I enjoyed the first three films, endured the latter two, and take constant stick at work for failing to rave about what others on the team see as a religious experience. However, despite getting R2-D2 and C-3PO mixed up, I love my first-person shooters and was a huge fan of *Heretic II*, Raven's first foray into the third-person. I found the last *Jedi Knight* game a bit of a mixed bag, but can happily report that this is a shooter of extremely solid proportions, with an intriguing amount of choices offered (first or third-person, light or dark side). OK, it throws few surprises your way, but overall it stands up as one of the best action experiences you can currently buy. The mix of first and third-person is spot-on, the inclusion of Force powers lifts it above your standard shooter and I have to grudgingly acknowledge (despite the fact I've got no desire to bed George Lucas) that the Lightsaber is probably the greatest weapon of all time. Top stuff, although I can't help the sneaking suspicion that Raven is coasting a bit, putting out just enough to keep people happy without trying to push the envelope.

comment of that mysterious energy that binds the universe together and next to which the ability to destroy a planet is insignificant. And if being a saber-wielding Jedi is what Star Wars is all about, then this could very well be the best Star Wars game ever. [C2]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Superb combat, with spectacular saber battles and 16 cool Force powers
- ✓ Really feels like *Star Wars*, with loads of fun guest appearances
- ✓ Rip-roaring plot and branching endings
- ✗ Largely similar to previous game
- ✗ Slightly dated *Quake III* graphics

89

More fun than a barrel-full of Ewoks

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XBOX WORLD
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"Alongside Halo in the
list of Xbox Shooters
you simply must own"

9/10

PS2

"Exceptional."

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PSW

"Mace Griffin is Halo for
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9/10

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NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE



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ETA: Out Now | nwn.bioware.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Rhianna Pratchett dusts off her tunic and enters the first expansion pack for *Neverwinter Nights*

WHILE THEY might not have been the first developers to bring AD&D into the world of computer games, Bioware took the pen and paper world of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, cradled it lovingly in their arms, and made it their own gaming vision. *The Baldur's Gate* games have since become formidable pillars in the RPG world, and I for one am glad I'll die knowing what a Kobold and a Gnoll are.

With *Neverwinter Nights*, Bioware paid tribute to the community that had supported them for so long, creating a game that not only had a great single-player campaign, but also included multiplayer, a toolset



Yes, but he has a lovely personality.

and a dungeon master client. It was the works, a full three course meal, and thank god we've had 12 months to digest it, because here comes the port and cigars in the form of *Shadows Of Undrentide*, *Neverwinter Nights*' first expansion pack.

NEW TOYS FOR ALL

Shadows introduces quite a few new elements to the game across the whole board. Brand new character classes (see boxout), monsters, spells, items, henchmen, even three new toolset tiles: a rural winter, desert and ruins for modding fans. Everything also carries over to the original game.

The story starts off far away from the original city of *Neverwinter*, in a place called



See the pretty lights, see them dance, see them burn your eyes!

Hilltop, in the remote Silver Marches. There you find yourself studying as an apprentice under a dwarven wizard named Drogan. In the initial plotline, which is rather too reminiscent of the start of *Neverwinter Nights*, the school gets broken into, Drogan is poisoned and four magic artefacts are stolen. Your job is, yep you guessed it,

to retrieve these four powerful objects and to find a way to cure your fallen master.

Right away you have the choice between two henchmen: a female dwarf cleric/rogue and a half-orc sorcerer/fighter and there's also a bard who you come across

later on, but *Shadows* could really have done with a more meaty, tank-style henchman, such as a fighter or paladin, to aid players who prefer to create magic-user or ranged-weapon based characters.

As with *Neverwinter*, you have a certain



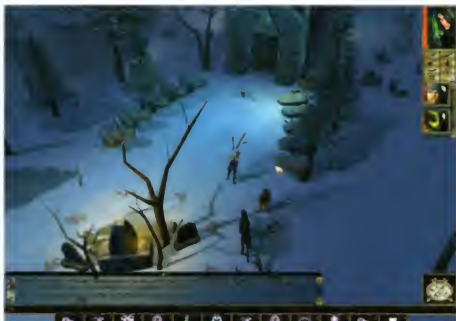
INPERSPECTIVE

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

Reviewed issue 117, Score 94%
Designed for the hardcore enthusiast who delights in the intricacies of character development, *Morrowind* has stats galore and an epic world to tinker with.

DUNGEON SIEGE

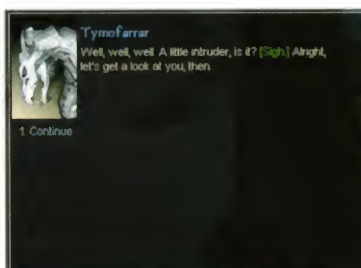
Reviewed issue 114, Score 89%
More action-oriented than either *Morrowind* or *Neverwinter Nights*, with bugger-all storyline and team-based RPG combat set amid stunning scenery.



Hmmm, I wonder what's through there?



Let there be light!



You can't make an RPG without a dragon.

amount of control over your buddies' tactics and the way they increase their levels. You can access your henchmen's inventory and select the weapons and armour they use, in the same way you would your own, an option that was sorely missing from the original game.

NOT SO DUMB

The gameplay itself doesn't differ too much from the original, and you'll get at least 20+ hours of it (spread across three chapters) for your money. Bioware has obviously taken heed of criticisms that it had dumbed-down the storyline in *Neverwinter Nights* for a more mass market audience, because *Shadows* feels a bit more like the good old days of *Baldur's*

Gate. Even the henchmen are much more talkative, get involved with random dialogues and offer more advice, so you're not given the feeling that someone is, rather subtly, stalking you.

A nice little feature that actually affects the way you play the game is the way in which you travel to and from safety. In the original you were given a stone of recall that you could use whenever you wished to transport yourself out of danger into the welcoming arms of the Neverwinter keep. In *Shadows*, you have a magic ring, which can transport you back to the safety of Drogon's school. However, it can only be activated if you have a focus crystal, and crystals can only be

HONOUR AND PRESTIGE

SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE GETS CLASSY

Shadows Of Undrentide introduces five new 'prestige' characters into the role-playing fray. These are: Blackguard, Arcane Archer, Assassin, Harper Scout and Shadowdancer, and all can be created in *Neverwinter Nights*, which you can then play through as one of these new character classes. The prestige classes work in a similar way to multi-classing, apart from the fact that they are much more complicated to obtain because they require certain conditions in order to access them, such as race, feats, alignment and base attack.

It would have been nice to see a few more normal character classes thrown into the mix as well as the prestige characters, as these new classes are obviously geared towards more advanced, hardcore players. Those of you who like to plan your character development well in advance and probably start the game half a dozen times before you settle on your virtual life choice (you know who you are). Saying that, once you see the Assassin's death attack, you'll find it hard to go for any other class.



The Arcane Archer gives the bad guys a good kicking.

made by combining three types of gems in Drogon's laboratory.

OUT IN THE OPEN

Since transportation thus becomes more of an effort to obtain, you tend to stay out in the fresh air more (which is probably good for you) and juggle your inventory, rather than risk being stuck in the

middle of a Kobold nest with nothing but a sword and a smile to get you out.

Overall, *Shadows Of Undrentide* contains what RPGers want – lots of new 'stuff'. The prestige classes in particular will help improve the longevity of the game, especially in multiplayer. There's been an effort to clean up gameplay issues from the original, although it would have been nice if the engine had been given more of a spruce-up.

Like a kindly Santa Claus, Bioware has made sure everyone gets something they like, and in *Shadows Of Undrentide*, there's a lot to like. It's an early Christmas for *Neverwinter Nights* fans.

"Shadows Of Undrentide feels a bit more like the good old days of Baldur's Gate"



So that's what dragon's eat.



As with all mystical vehicles this gypsy caravan is much bigger on the inside.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great single-player campaign
- ✓ Plenty of new features and options
- ✓ New prestige classes
- ✗ Engine is looking a bit ropey
- ✗ Lacks a tank henchman

85

Something for everyone

FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004 A CENTURY OF FLIGHT



■ £49.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Microsoft | ETA: Out Now |
www.microsoft.com/games/flightsimulator

REQUIRES PIII 450MHz, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Having lived through a fair chunk of history himself, most of it while high as a kite, who better than Paul Presley to review the next instalment of Microsoft's legendary *Flight Sim*?

OH NO, *Flight Sim* again?

Wasn't it like all of two hours ago we were reviewing *Flight Sim 2002*? (More like a year and a half – Ed.) We've heard that for the next one Microsoft will apparently be teaming up with EA to produce a range of *Flight Sim* titles, including *Flight Sim 2006 Premier All-Stars*, *Road To Flight Sim 2006* and *Flight Sim '02-'06 Challenge*. Like the *FIFA* series, each game will have a different professional pilot on the front

cover depending on territory – France will have Roland Garros, the first Frenchman to cross the Mediterranean by air; Britain will have Terry Thomas and Eric Sykes from *Those Magnificent Men And Their Flying Machines*; Colorado will have John Denver.

Anyhow, that's all just made-up speculation for the future

(although wouldn't it be great?). For now we're being presented with *Flight Simulator 2004 – A Century Of Flight*, celebrating 100 (and one) years of powered aviation. At least that's what it says on the box. What it means in practice is that basically we've got *Flight Sim 2002* with fluffier clouds, a handful of historic

aircraft and menus with a more educational bent than normal.

HISTORY TODAY

Of course, I'm exaggerating for comic effect. There's more to it than that, but you don't become one of the country's leading literary humorists like what I am

by sticking with mere fact. Microsoft has made a noble attempt to foster the spirit of a century of going up-diddly-up-up, even if at times you do feel as though it's skimmed on making a thorough examination of the last 100 years.

Of the nine historical planes included, there's nothing from the

INPERSPECTIVE

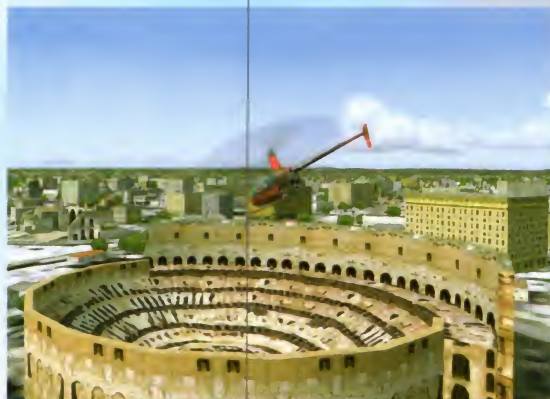
IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 92%
 Much like FS2004, except set in World War II Russia and with the option to shoot at things. So, er, not that much like FS2004 after all then.

X-PLANE V6

Reviewed Issue 132, Score 55%

This is what happens when you try to do the *Flight Sim* thing but with a fraction of the budget and even less talent.



Helicopters are now actually flyable! Yes.



Ooh, fluffy. Like Candyfloss, but in the sky.

The Tin Goose. Not just a plane but in some places, a delicacy.



The big cheat. Look, you can see the wires.

jet era, nothing military and none of the experimental X-plane models that were used to break sound barriers during the '60s. For Microsoft, aviation history apparently stopped in the 1930s and picked up again in the present day. While the cynic in me detects an expansion pack in the works, the eager-young-gamer-standing-at-the-counter-with-a-crisp-fifty-quid-note in me wishes they would do these things properly first time round.

BLACK BOX

Mind you, what is included is nicely handled. Each of the historical winged jalopies comes with a raft of pre-generated flights designed to let you relive the glories of the past. One thing that definitely can't be faulted is the range of activities on offer. A quick stunt ride through an open barn in a Curtiss Jenny, or a truly ridiculous 136-hour flight from England to Australia in a pre-WWI Vickers – there's no shortage of stuff to do.

Having these epic 'missions' actually highlights one of the biggest flaws that's plagued the entire *Flight Sim* range since the very first entry back in 1951 on the old Babbage home valve-switching arithmetic calculation device X100 – there's never any sense of achievement and reward system on offer.

Surely by now, after 20 years, it's time that someone at Microsoft said, "Hang

fast chaps, what about adding some bally gameplay mechanics to the dashed thing?" When you play *Tomb Raider* you're safe in the knowledge that between the levels you'll be treated to some pre-rendered scripting as a way for the developers to say thank you for having stared at Lara's

"What about adding some bally gameplay mechanics to the dashed thing?"

arse crack jumping around the platforms for the past hour. Why not something similar here?

NEED FOR SPEED

All I'm saying is alongside the 'Create Flight', 'Select Flight' and 'Comedy Stylings of John & Martha' (see boxout) options on the menu, add one that says 'Career Pilot' and bolt a rudimentary progression factor to things. Start with a single-engine Cessna in a small aerodrome, ferry things about for cash, gradually affording bigger and faster planes, tying in the flight lessons with your journey in a *Gran Turismo* licence stylee. Suddenly the series opens up to a far wider audience (cha-ching, Microsoft!), surely a good thing?

Anyhow, back to the present and really, what's to say? Other

than all the history stuff, there's nothing in *Flight Sim 2004* that you're not expecting. Better graphics of course (they're really quite lovely now). A totally revamped weather system that's as real as anything we've seen to date. The auto-gen scenery engine works with the respective

terrains much better than before (meaning cities now actually look like proper cities when you fly over them). The ATC has had a complete upgrade and despite one or two minor bugs involving aircraft disappearing from runways and the like, makes the skies around you feel as busy and alive as they used to in the old *Flight Unlimited* series (the previous standard bearer). Virtual cockpits are also now included in every plane in the box, which helps the flight experience immensely.

Fundamentally it comes down to whether you like flying planes for the sake of flying planes or not. There's no reason not to like *Flight Sim 2004* other than for the subject matter. Technically it's a near flawless product, and certainly the best civil flight sim



New York finally manages to look like a proper city.


'KING HELL

THE GREATEST DOUBLE ACT IN GAMING HISTORY IS BACK

Used by Microsoft to help welcome aspiring pilots to the past few versions of *Flight Sim*, John and Martha King are an institution (much like botulism). As you watch their informative yet amusing video segments guiding players through aspects such as 'First Flights' and 'Keyboard Setups', you can feel the unbridled sexual tension oozing from your monitor. The playful way Martha teases John about setting up his joystick, she might as well be saying "Take me now you stallion." The wistful glances John casts towards Martha as she runs through flap settings scream of a passion to shake the foundations of lust itself. I need to lie down.



John and Martha King. Hot.

on the market. The history aspect adds a new dimension to the proceedings and is as good a reason as any to make you rush out and buy it – a move I can highly recommend. Not that the fans won't already be installing it anyway. Must be nice to have a guaranteed audience like that. 

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Plenty of all-round enhancements
- ✓ Lots of historical 'missions'
- ✓ Fantastic weather effects
- ✓ Virtual cockpits for every plane
- ✗ Still no sense of 'game'
- ✗ Needs to be even more user-friendly

89

Could join the mile high club



It's not a patch on *Prisoner Of War*.

Verging on excitement.



You'll make several mad dashes for freedom in the game.



Blythe makes a dirty protest at the appalling graphics.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

■ £29.99 | Pub: SCI | Dev: Pivotal Games | ETA: August 29 | www.thegreatescapesgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 933MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill meets Steve McQueen in the game of the film of the war

WITH WORLD War II games still proving popular, and a burgeoning trend for old film licences, an adaptation of the 1963 classic might seem a salient move. However, as anyone who has managed to stay awake during the perennial Boxing Day outing will confirm, there isn't actually a great deal of action to go on. Steve 'The Cooler King' McQueen bouncing a baseball against the walls of a solitary confinement cell might make for an intense study in macho defiance, but not

necessarily a thrilling interactive experience. As such, this is more a case of a game inspired by the film, and as the title sequence states, features 'certain audiovisual components,' primarily McQueen's gob and the timeless theme tune, as appropriated by a generation of England supporters.

SHADOW MAN

Essentially a 3D version of *Commandos*, missions are split between four characters – including McQueen – each with an array of different, albeit barely discernible, skills. Escaping from places naturally plays a large part in the proceedings, as does stealthily sneaking about. As such, there's a lot of hiding in the shadows, cunningly avoiding searchlights and crawling around on your belly to avoid the 'Goons', as the Axis forces are constantly referred to as.

All the WWII movie clichés are present and correct, with Germans speaking English in absurd accents while displaying a limited degree of (artificial) intelligence in keeping with their Hollywood portrayal. As such, they can be thrown off the scent by such ploys as dressing up in a

dismissing it as the wind. And if you are spotted, there is always the option to make a comic bid for freedom, punching armed guards in the face and running for it. You are almost always shot or caught, but it at least provides some entertainment amid the constant skulking. That said,

your full attention rather than running in gung-ho.

But despite the game's shortcomings, there is a stiff-upper-lip charm that encourages you to continue, if only to see what happens next. And it will take you a while to get through the 18 missions, culminating in the famous motorbike scene. Providing of course that you're still awake. **[X]**

"All the WWII movie clichés are present and correct"

German uniform, forging documents, and in one case simply hiding in the bogs of a train (if it can foil British Rail ticket collectors, it'll do for the Gestapo).

KILL ALL DOGS

Not being detected is key to success, and there are some genuine moments of suspense, with guards seemingly discovering you before

there are a few action-oriented missions, featuring vehicles, weapons and, impressively, strangling dogs.

Interface-wise, it is a bit clunky, utilising a pseudo-adventure game inventory that effectively pauses the game whenever it is opened. And only having a limited number of saves per level may irk quick-save happy PC gamers, although it does ensure that you give it

INPERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE

Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%
Proof that 3D isn't always better.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 94%
The definitive World War II game.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Quite suspenseful
- ✓ Strangling dogs
- ✗ Too much stealth
- ✗ Looks cheap

61

Great Escape, average game

FEEL REAL



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Brief

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Features

- Continuous time / Timed play World War II 3D strategy game.
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- Company level tactical setting with the emphasis on small unit tactics.
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- Detailed psychological model.
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Out 26th September



FREEDOM GAMES



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Bethesda | ETA: Out Now | pirates.bethsoft.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Ahoy me landlubbin' maties, shiver me timbers and ooh, where's me ship?
Chris Anderson can no longer talk properly. We blame this RPG pirate romp



The death screen, which you will be seeing a lot of.

YOU CAN almost hear the sound of players running at top speed in fear of their lives at the thought of another movie tie-in masquerading as a PC game. But relax, people, apart from a tenuous plot tie-in, the two are related in name only.

Pirates Of The Caribbean (or *Sea Dogs 2* as it was more commonly known until Ubi Soft decided they could make more money by changing the title), is an RPG which plays by its own rules, unhindered by any links to the movie of the same name. It's brought to us by Bethesda, the developer behind *Morrowind*. But while *Morrowind* was remarkable for its groundbreaking construction set, *Pirates* will make waves for a different reason – namely its gobsmacking visuals.

IMPERSPECTIVE

MORROWIND

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 94%
PotC has similar open-ended gameplay to *Morrowind*, but does not even approach its incredible depth and complexity.

SEA DOGS

Reviewed Issue 100, Score 70%
 Purists may prefer the more in-depth gameplay of the original over the graphically lush but ultimately shallow sequel.



“The stupendous visuals make even the fairly basic land and sea combat enjoyable”



One thing's for sure – the visuals are breath-taking.



Sea battles are best controlled in first-person.



Unsheath your sword, block and retaliate – that's about it.

With such a stupendous engine at play, even the land and sea combat – which are fairly basic – become enjoyable thanks to some great effects and explosions. Both first and third-person views are supported, though in first-person the camera has an annoying habit of randomly jumping back into third-person view.

COLONY WARS

Back to the story: things kick off right away when an English colony is taken over by the French. The governor of a nearby island sends you off to get to the bottom of it, thus pitting you head-to-head with our garlic-munching friends from across the water. While all this isn't the most compelling plot we've ever seen, there's enough to keep you wanting to know what's going to happen next.

General gameplay is a mixed bag, with a host of role-playing elements which see you gaining experience and attaining ever

higher levels through quests, combat, trading, crew management and a choice of skills and abilities. But sadly these aren't nearly as varied as you'd like them to be, and feel thoroughly underdeveloped.

Thankfully, the open-ended gameplay, combined with some of the best RPG graphics ever, make *Pirates Of The Caribbean* an enjoyable experience, if hardly an essential one.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Beautiful graphics
- ✓ Combination of gaming styles
- ✓ Open-ended gameplay
- ✗ Cumbersome console interface
- ✗ Very limited dialogue trees
- ✗ Fairly shallow beneath its suggested complexity

70

Shipwrecked beauty

MIDNIGHT CLUB II



£29.99 | Pub: Rockstar Games | Dev: Rockstar San Diego |
ETA: Out Now | www.rockstargames.com/midnightclub2

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.8 GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill has been in a club at midnight, more than twice. He still can't drive very well though



"Show us your bum for ten pence."

OOH, LOOK at us, we're Rockstar, we're a bit dangerous. Following the success of their various brutality 'em ups, that would appear to be the edict of the burgeoning publisher. This is clearly evident in *Midnight Club II*, which bills itself as 'The Future Of Illegal Street Racing'. How so? Well, take the pedestrians for instance. Instead of leaping out of the way – as in, say, *Midtown Madness* – they are fair game for your bumper, and ending their sorry lives results in no more than a dull thud, like the sound of someone kicking an empty wheelie bin. No penalty incurred, and it's simply pointless violence.

Hang on, did someone mention *Midtown Madness*? By Angel Studios, the developer

now known as Rockstar San Diego? Cue the sound of a penny dropping. The clues are all there – the destructible scenery, the vague approximations of major cities, the police on your back, the ambient traffic, even the pedestrian animations are uncannily similar, except this time round they're not so quick. Freed from the family values of erstwhile publisher Microsoft, this is simply the latest incarnation of that studio's driving concept, infused with a healthy dollop of Rockstar attitude.

LA BABY

As such, it's a very good thing. Tearing around Los Angeles, Paris or Tokyo in a variety of fictional cars (and some decent motorbikes) is highly entertaining, with the AI drivers proving particularly able opponents. There is a lengthy career mode to undertake, with vehicles, cities and various extras becoming available only after completing some fairly taxing challenges. The urban nature of the settings means that different routes can be taken between the checkpoints, and intimate knowledge of the cities

can reveal some handy shortcuts. The Arcade mode lets you enjoy the spoils of your career, and as well as straightforward circuit races, there are also Capture The Flag and Detonator modes, all playable over a LAN or the Internet.

CITY SLICKER

The cars appear to be loosely based on actual models, and while the handling errs on the side of arcadey, an analogue controller is a must, as it proves far too twitchy for the keyboard. Graphically, it's solid if

You'll believe a car can fly.

unspectacular, and setting the action at night has at least spared them the need for great detail (after all, let's not forget that it's a PlayStation 2 game). That said, anyone who has visited the cities in the game (smugly, I've been to all three) will instantly recognise certain areas, and there is value to be had

in simply sightseeing in the Cruise mode.

Not a bad addition to the driving oeuvre then, and while not in the same league as the *GTA* games, there may be room for it in your collection if you fancy something a little more orthodox. **PC**



The police take a dim view of illegal street racing.

IMPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%
One of the best games ever to grace the PC, this is the ultimate free-form shooting and driving experience, with a superbly acted script to boot.

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 84%
From the same developer as *MCII*, and featuring some similar ideas.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent AI
- ✓ Host of options
- ✗ PS2 graphics
- ✗ Derivative

81

Midnight madness



Tracking down a particular space ship can be a nightmare.



The graphics are politely described as rudimentary.



Also worth a mention is the impressive, and non-cheating enemy AI.

GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS

■ £24.99 | Pub: Empire | Dev: Stardock |
ETA: Out Now | www.galciv.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and an 8MB graphics card

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB graphics card

Steve O'Hagan takes another trip to the stars, but still falls short of heaven

THE SITUATION at the beginning of *Galactic Civilizations* is a familiar one. You are the leader of the human race. Interstellar travel has just become a reality. And it's up to you to fight and bargain and barter your way to supremacy in a turn-based strategy game in the best traditions of the XXXX (Explore, Expand, Exploit, Exterminate) genre.

Your first go on *Gal Civ* will be a nightmare, guaranteed. This is down to the lack of a tutorial, but once over this hurdle any space

strategy fan worth their salt will have few problems getting to grips with the game's now familiar collection of economy, diplomacy, military and research information screens.

ALL ABOARD

Where *GC* differentiates itself from the majority of its competitors is in its simplicity. At heart, it's a board game. The map is 2D. Ships of two races can't inhabit the same 'square'. You even press the space bar during planetary assaults to generate a random number, simulating a dice roll.

But this table-top comparison isn't always flattering – *GC* has major problems in organising and displaying its information. Where's the hell's that ship? What facilities has this planet constructed? Who does that star base belong to? After a few hours play it did indeed remind us of a board game – one which someone has bumped into, sending the counters and fake money all over the place.

With the lack of a separate tactical combat engine, and no options to customise your fleet of starships, *GC* is not one for those to whom 'empire building' means 'conquest'.

But those who prefer wielding diplomacy and economics as their weapons will be entirely satisfied. *GC* does a fine job of presenting a living, breathing universe of backstabbing, manipulative and intelligent factions who react in logical ways to your manoeuvrings. Money, influence, ships, planets, technologies and treaties can be horse-traded. Sell ships to an ally to fight against a mutual enemy without getting blood on your hands, or bind potential aggressors to you with trade routes and technology exchanges. Machiavellian methods work well here.

DOPPLEGANGER

This diplomacy system is just one of many aspects of the game that are quite clearly heavily influenced by Sid Meier's *Civilization* series. And we're not just talking in spirit, but in gameplay particulars.



The AI never 'cheats' by giving itself free fleets or resources.

OK, the name should have given it away, but we're not the brightest stars in the firmament.

For 'wonders of the world' read 'wonders of the galaxy'. For 'warrior' read 'starfighter'. For 'city' read 'planet'. The mechanics the two games share in common are more abundant than space dust.

Regardless, at the end of the day, it's an engrossing

game and steals hours before you know it – a good sign in this genre. But its reliance on *Civ* as a template and the increasingly messy presentation as the game progresses means it doesn't do quite enough to truly distinguish itself from the pack. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

MASTER OF ORION 33

Reviewed issue 128, Score 59%

The *MOO* series has provided the yardstick for space strategy games for a few years now, but this latest installment was a step backwards by incorporating too much detail and complexity for its own good. Recent patches have improved things a little.

CIVILIZATION 3

Reviewed issue 111, Score 86%

The game that *Gal Civ* tries so hard to emulate, but doesn't really come close to touching. The 'Civ in space' format could be a runner, but you'd need to do a better job of emulating the streamlined playability and elegant interface of this classic.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's Civ in space
- ✓ Great diplomacy and economic system
- ✓ Simple to get to grips with
- ✗ It's Civ in space
- ✗ No tutorial
- ✗ Becomes unmanageable

72

Will appeal to less militaristic fans of the genre



Trade goods between villages of viking gnomes. Scintillating.

NORTHLAND

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Fanatics | ETA: August 8 |
www.northland-game.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Daniel Emery joins a group of Vikings for a night of pillage, plunder and hardcore micromanagement

IT'S BEEN the cause of two shuttle disasters, countless appalling dance remixes and fashion statements from your worst nightmare: retro sucks, and it always will.

Not that there's anything wrong with a little nostalgia. Faded photos of an old-flame who's name you've long forgotten, a MAME version of *Pac-Man*, even dusting off an old copy of *Civilization* is fun now and again, but there's a place for these things and it's the back of your cupboard.

Northland is retro gone wrong. While certain classic games keep their appeal with dodgy graphics and old-skool

gameplay, the bulk need new engines, new graphics and a serious makeover to keep their appeal. *Northland* lacks in all these essential areas.

CULTURE SHOCK

The game closely resembles *Cultures 2* in both gameplay and graphics for a very simple reason: it's practically the same game. The developers, wisely, chose not to call it *Cultures 3*, as that would imply a new engine. Instead we're left with the same old plot of helping your Vikings take over a land by taking control of every aspect of their community, from collecting resources to matching up couples to expand your population. It also has the same old fixed isometric view as the previous two games. Basically, think of it as *Cultures 2.5* and you're pretty much there.

But mediocre graphics aside, what's it like as a game? The

short answer is 'complex'. Some games you can load up and play without too much messing about. After all, if the game's good, the gameplay should be intuitive. Not so with *Northland*. The tutorials are essential so you can learn all the little intricacies, including how to build up your army and how to create a virtual dating agency for lonely Scandinavians. It isn't as fun as it sounds.

The game is more about time management of your characters than the business of

exploration and violence. What's more, your characters are so damn fluffy, with minimal plundering involved, while the violence is comical. Imagine a Disney version of *Gladiator*.

UGLY BUCK

But it's not all doom and gloom. The game, once you've mastered it, can be fun, and hours turn into days as you work out the best way to build your village and tame the area. Of course, it can become a bit formulaic, but the maps are varied enough to ensure things don't always go the way you planned.

There are plenty of annoying aspects too. Your troops will suddenly walk off in the middle of the battle to get a bite to eat, while the AI pathing sometimes goes totally demented.

Northland may appeal to lovers of hardcore strategy gaming, who haven't played the *Cultures* games before, and don't mind hugely dated graphics. But for the bulk of us, this average game is probably best avoided. Had the publishers priced this in the £10 category it would definitely be worth a flutter – but at £29.99 this is plundering on a far more real level. **[C-]**



For Christ's sake, do something...



Choose the sex of future generations.

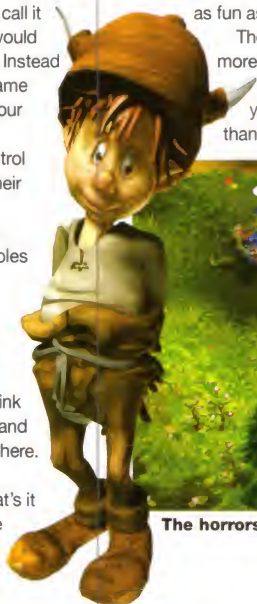
IMPERSPECTIVE

CULTURES 2: THE GATES OF ASGARD

Reviewed Issue 117, Score 45%
 Much the same as *Northland* in both look and gameplay, but slightly less accessible.

SETTLERS IV

Reviewed Issue 101, Score 83%
 A far superior example of this genre. Better graphics, better gameplay and an engine that wasn't built in the dark ages.



The horrors of war.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Simple fun
- ✓ Massively hardcore (if you like that sort of thing)
- ✗ Old graphics
- ✗ Too much micromanagement
- ✗ Fixed one-angle isometric view

48

Been there – done that

GLOBAL DOMINATION STRATEGY



www.gmxmedia.net/massiveassault

"Massive Assault is definitively a great potential game and it's on a way to become a great turn-by-turn strategy game. Perhaps the best ever, who knows?"
- Jeux PC

"Strategy Gaming has never been so sweet!"
- Gamespy.com

83% - Christian Computer Game Reviews



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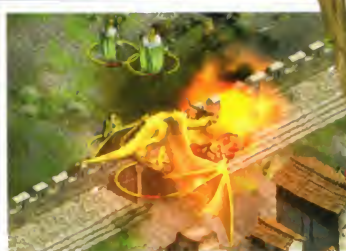
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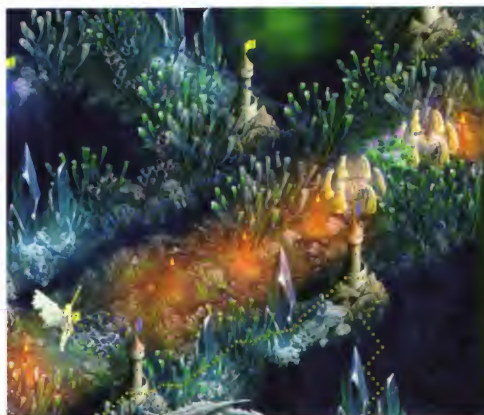
Out 17th October



Dragons are handy to have around.



Bunching your units together can have serious disadvantages...



The Shadow World – a place of strange plants.

AGE OF WONDERS: SHADOW MAGIC



■ £24.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Triumph Studios |
ETA: July 25 | aow2.godgames.com/shadowmagic/home.html

REQUIRES PII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 192MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Keith Pullin find goblins more and more attractive in this fantasy turn-based strategy game

HERE'S A worrying thought: sometimes I actually like elves, dwarves and goblins and all that nonsense. Recently it's been happening more often too: first *Neverwinter Nights*, then *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*, and now this, *Age Of Wonders: Shadow Magic*. It must have something to do with growing fat and getting old – maybe I should get out and play more golf.

At the end of *AoW II: The Wizards Throne*, Merlin was victorious over the Circle of Traitorous Wizards. Sadly, as he settled on his throne a terrible cataclysm struck. Shadowy demons began to spew from the old wizard's towers and

eventually all wizards including Merlin were banished forever. A couple of wizards secretly remain though, in order to rid the world of these foul demons, and this is where *AoW:SM* begins...

MONSTER MUNCH

Like most turn-based games such as *Heroes Of Might & Magic IV*, *Warlords III* and *Etherlords*, the main aim in *AoW:SM* is to romp around a fantasy landscape fighting monsters. Your heroes and armies gain experience, collect magical items, uncover secret treasures and embark on the odd impromptu quest set by the gods. Overall it's a non-stop

magical mystery tour of the highest calibre.

However, economics also play a vital role. Building barracks, wizard towers and temples to make your cities stronger and capable of pumping out better units is just as important as battlefield tactics. Gameplay for most turn-based games is slow and thoughtful and in that respect *AoW:SM* remains loyal to its forefathers.

Minor, if not earth-shattering improvements have been made though. There are now six spheres of magic to learn, and there are three new races: Nomads, Shadow Demons and the mysterious Syrons. Needless

to say these races boast their own new heroes and units.

All 12 existing races have undergone changes. Each species has a new city upgrade, which comes with a new unit. Elves, for example, can grow a secret forest, which not only acts as a cloaking device for their town, it also produces the powerful Ent-like Treemen. Overall gameplay feels more balanced than in *AoWII*, as each race is as good as the next.

MAGIC MIX

The *AoW* series has always been playable and *AoW:SM* is no exception. It's certainly value for money with 16 campaign

scenarios as well as a further 19 for skirmish and multiplayer (plus a level editor), yet overall it's nowhere near as groundbreaking as *Etherlords*.

That said I will be playing this for a good while yet, the trouble is it is just so bloody addictive – and that from someone who's usually a bit wary of goblins. But hey, it's the gameplay that counts, and *AoW:SM* is exceedingly playable. If you're hanging on for *Warlords IV: Heroes Of Etheria*, you could certainly do a lot worse than this while you wait. **PCW**

INPERSPECTIVE

WARLORDS III

Reviewed Issue 55, Score 90%

Some people like a 2D turn-based fantasy, and so for all you traditionalists out there, *Warlords III* should suffice.

ETHERLORDS

Reviewed issue 112, Score 87%

Better than *Heroes Of Might & Magic IV* and about the best you can get in its genre, *Etherlords* is graphically groundbreaking, boasts a slick interface and is addictive as hell.



Graphically, it's not too impressive.



The variety of landscapes is commendable.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Three new races
- ✓ Loads of new heroes and units
- ✓ Very playable and addictive
- ✓ Always a lot happening
- ✗ Maps are too large at first
- ✗ No major improvements

80

Quite magical

"Republic rules! 80%" **PCGAMER**

"The actions allow you to be politically incorrect, underhand or downright nasty."



"Games that dare to be as unique as this deserve every plaudit you can throw at them. Revolutionary 88%."



PCZONE

REPUBLICTM

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Kicking up a storm. (Ha ha, geddit? Desert? Storm?)

WWII DESERT RATS

■ £19.99 | Pub: THQ |
Dev: Canopy Games | ETA: Out Now

We had a bet in the office – who out of Ant, myself and Will would get the best of the three THQ games in for review this month. As the other scores show, I won. And considering how low *WWII Desert Rats* scored, that gives you some idea of how bad the other two were. It's a "combat driving adventure" apparently, although the same can be said about getting a lift home from the late Oliver Reed,

neither of which are experiences I would wish upon anyone.

Imagine the driving bits of *Battlefield 1942*, limit the levels to a big sandpit, make it single-player and restrict it to in-car shooting only. Couple it with unfriendly camera controls, shoddy animations and dull gameplay and bingo, that's it.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT **21**

RICH DIAMOND

■ \$19.95 (from www.richdiamond.com) | Pub: Core Concepts | Dev: Core Concepts | ETA: Out Now



It looks ugly...

In a tribute to Spinal Tap, I wanted to give this a two-word review: "Shit Diamond". But Korda insisted on a few more words. First of all, yes, that really is a screenshot of a 2003 game. It's commendable when small developers decide to publish their own games as a download or by sending you a CD you can order online, but that doesn't excuse charging around £12 for a game that would have been laughed at as shareware five years ago. It's a sort of



...and it's not much fun either.

retro puzzle-filled *Pac-Man*, where you push boulders and collect diamonds. It's also frustrating, repetitive and not very enjoyable. You can play seven levels for free, and it's hard to imagine anyone fool enough to pay for the remaining 73, never mind coughing up for the expansion packs.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT **20**

NAVY SEALS

■ £19.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Valu Soft | ETA: Out Now

Somewhere in Iraq a collection of evil moustachioed clones have hidden a lump of US technology inside an array of shitty caves and piss-poor bases. Your mission is to track it down, navigating a terrain that is littered with crack Iraqi troops just waiting to spot you and then stand still while you kill them. To aid you on your special-ops killing spree, you're given a collection of rubbish guns, that make pathetic 'click click' sounds instead of the standard 'bang bang' ones, which makes the whole affair even more unsatisfying.



Tanks 'throw' grenades.

With more bugs than a termite mound and less imagination than a brick, *Navy SEALs* is one of the biggest pieces of poo to ever grace a hard-drive. With tanks so lazily programmed they appear to throw grenades, rather than fire shells, helicopters that have the rare ability to instantly and randomly kill you through walls and graphics from Satan's bowels, *Navy SEALs* is one of the finest examples of gaming excrement you can buy.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT **11**



"Don't just stand there, kill me."

PURE PINBALL

■ £TBA | Pub: Koch Media | Dev: Iridon Interactive | ETA: TBA



Great gameplay, shame it's so short-lived.

Available in Germany and to be released here in the UK too, *Pure Pinball* is an average pinball sim that offers nothing new to the genre. From the unimaginative tables to a complete lack of weight to the balls, there's little to get excited about.

Each of the three tables contains different themes, and the bonuses are fairly varied from rare multi-balls (giving you the hectic task of juggling several balls at once), to extreme multipliers that rapidly expand your score.

The table's combos are vaguely different too. On the 'World War' table, you can hit a bumper that will open a gate, allowing you to

attack a different part of the table, which offers a modicum of variation to the otherwise overly simplistic tables.

What's more, once you've beaten the game's high scores, and unlocked the secret sections of each table, there remains little more to do, and it's hard not to feel disappointed.

While *Pure Pinball* looks fairly impressive and offers an array of viewpoints to play from, it just doesn't feel realistic enough to warrant buying. You'd be better off heading down to the pub for a game instead.

Alex Hay

PCZONE VERDICT **50**





BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS

■ £19.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive |
Dev: Eutechnyx | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 96MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Steve Hill gets behind the wheel and hits the road

GET YOUR motor running, head out on the highway, looking for adventure, and whatever comes our way. Not my words, but those of '60s rockers Steppenwolf, whose driving anthem *Born To Be Wild* became synonymous with hippy road movie *Easy Rider*, and is now resurrected for the rousing intro of financial lorry driving sim, *Big Mutha Truckers*. They must be very proud.

Almost as proud as the titular Big Mutha is of her four offspring, Cletus, Rawkus, Bobbie-Sue and Earl, one of whom she deigns to leave the family trucking business to. That honour will fall to whomever can rustle up the most cash in a 60-day period through foul means or fair, be it transporting

commodities or carrying out dubious jobs for local villains.

Anyone remember *King Of The Road*? This is essentially a comedy version of that game, with the humour poking fun at residents of the Southern United States, as well as relying on the fact that 'truck' rhymes with a sexual swear word. There are even five GTA-style radio stations, albeit playing largely incongruous music.

Trucks can be upgraded, different types of trailers fitted, races undertaken, and there are also run-ins with the police and local bikers to contend with, not to mention the loan sharks that you have to turn to when funds run low, with the game boasting some reasonably complex economics. However,



Who drives in a truck like this?

PCZONE VERDICT **54**
Truck right off

for all the trimmings, it essentially involves driving from one place to another in a great big lorry. And if that was any fun, we'd all be doing it.



Race rival truckers for cash.



The copy of Razzle on the dashboard is missing.



Not a bad looking game, but it can't compete with *Virtua Tennis*.

PERFECT ACE PRO TOURNAMENT TENNIS

■ £19.95 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: Aqua-Pacific |
ETA: Out Now

Does the PC need another tennis game? Oxygen Interactive thinks we do, so here's *Perfect Ace Pro Tournament Tennis*. On first viewing, the graphics are passable, with a variety of nicely rendered courts and reasonably detailed player graphics. The crowd, however, is 2D and about as attractive as the plebs that scream "come on Tim" at Wimbledon. Furthermore, there are only three modes: Single Match, Tournament and Championship. Not so good, then. Adding insult to injury is the fact that the keyboard controls are difficult to learn, although once mastered the game becomes pathetically simple in easy and medium modes, and

even in hard mode you can win most points with one strategy and one shot. So much for the 'Ultra-Real Tennis Experience' promised by the packaging.

The doubles games are annoying due to your crappy AI partners, who constantly miss easy shots and there are no female tennis players either. The ball animations are hideously annoying, at times defying the laws of physics, although strangely the players move quite realistically.

This game isn't worth your money, try *Virtua Tennis* instead.

Emma Hare

PCZONE VERDICT **30**

I WAS AN ATOMIC MUTANT

■ £19.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Canopy Games | ETA: Out Now



Crap PC game destroys the Earth.



Plan 9 From Outer Space isn't this bad.

There was probably a time when it would have been quite amusing to say that *I Was An Atomic Mutant* is the videogame equivalent of a straight-to-video action flick starring Michael Dudikoff. Not during his *American Ninja* heyday of course, but now, when he's

way past pulling off any semi-convincing leg sweeps and has resorted to making schlocky Z-grade disaster movies with men in rubber suits making a tired, prosaic parody

of '50s-style monster mayhem. But that wouldn't be funny, not any more, because the straight-to-budget game genre has now plumbed such depths that it would be an insult to compare it with the fine efforts of Hollywood's hard-working B-industry.

There's so little gameplay in this 'Rampage-in-3D'-style smash 'em up it barely rates as a screensaver. Choose one of four monsters, destroy everything in a series of bland cut and paste towns, swat the occasional fighter plane. That's it. Scandalous.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT **19**



LONDON RACER - WORLD CHALLENGE

■ £9.99 | Pub: Davilex Games | Dev: Davilex Games | ETA: September 15

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill digs out his passport, if not his driving licence

"THE ULTIMATE cannonball run across the globe!" barks the press release. "Another dreary Davilex racing game consigned to the hinterland of the reviews section", we respond. It doesn't seem to have overtly harmed them thus far though, with *London Racer 1* and 2 allegedly selling 600,000 copies in the UK alone (including PS2).

A clear case of not fixing what isn't broken, *London Racer - World Challenge* is effectively a 12in remix of everything that's gone before, and manages to



rack up some impressive numbers, with 76 tracks, 23 cars and 16 famous cities, including London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles and Stoke (actual truth may differ).

However, for all its cosmopolitan intent, major landmarks aside, you'd struggle to differentiate between a lot of them. Some indigenous flavour is added by the inclusion of localised

radio stations, although this is somewhat tarnished when they begin to repeat within the space of a lap. Otherwise, it's business as usual, with some leaden handling, bland graphics and

derivative ideas.

Despite the city settings, the tracks are largely linear, with the route demarcated by great big orange arrows. Power-ups are limited to nitro boosts and damage repairs, but races are generally fairly close affairs. Complications are provided by the police and ambient traffic, and it's basically a poor man's version of *Midnight Club II*. They can't even afford a handbrake. Cheapstakes.

PCZONE VERDICT

53

Cheap and cheerless



One of them fancy new Minis. Or not.



A bit of nitro gives you extra purchase.



Go on then, show us a stunt.

BEACH KING STUNT RACER

■ £9.99 | Pub: Davilex Games | Dev: Davilex Games | ETA: August 28

WE CAN'T think of many great games with the word 'Beach' in the title, and this does little to change that. It is mildly diverting though, and essentially involves performing outlandish stunts in a beach buggy. Think *Tony Hawk's* on four bouncy wheels and you're close.

Stunts make points, which in turn impress a watching bikini babe. She also demands diamonds though, and these are scattered around the reasonably complex levels, thus throwing some

platform elements into the mix. Get enough points and gems, and you can progress to the next level, taking in the hotspots of Rio, Ibiza, Bali and St Tropez, replete with relevant tunes, and local ladies. Despite the cheesiness, it's actually fairly polished and offers a reasonable challenge. Davilex: your best work yet.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

63

FIRE CHIEF

■ £19.99 | Pub: Monte Cristo | Dev: Monte Cristo | ETA: Out Now

THESE DAYS they may be in the news more for striking than for saving people's lives, but it seems odd that we haven't seen more games based on firefighters. Apart from run-of-the-mill platformer *Roscoe McQueen* a few years back, *Fire Chief* is the only title we can think of that puts you in the hardhat and flame-retardant overalls of a fireman.

Given a squad of men (including specialists such as medics) and a handful of emergency vehicles, you are faced with

a series of missions, each requiring you to rescue victims and douse flames in true isometric/3D RTS fashion – by pointing and clicking. Despite a short lifespan and the fact that micromanaging your charges is a burning pain in the proverbial, *Fire Chief* boasts some challenging, diverting gameplay and reasonably pretty graphics.

Sam Kieldsen

PCZONE VERDICT

60



Burn, baby, burn.



The real Blazin' Squad.



You won't find any hosepipe jokes here.



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REPLAY

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SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR WARLORD EDITION

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: September

NOW COME ON. Are you going to tell me you still haven't bought *Shogun: Total War*? The basic (non-Warlord) edition has been available for five quid for the best part of a year, so really, you've got no excuse. What's that? You still haven't bought it? Right, I'll try and persuade you, one last time.

Shogun is a 3D RTS set in feudal Japan, featuring gargantuan battles between armies numbering in the thousands, over stunning, fully tactical 3D landscapes. It comes bundled with the excellent *Mongol Invasion* expansion pack, and it's available for less than a fiver.

Not only did *Shogun* change the face of RTS gaming forever when it appeared three years ago, but it has embarrassed 99 per cent of strategy games that have appeared since.

Split into two parts – a 2D *Risk*-style strategy map on which to move your troops around the country's many provinces, and a 3D real-time battle section – *Shogun* offers a well of strategic possibility deeper than the North Atlantic. With unparalleled atmosphere and music good enough to happily grace a Hollywood movie, this pack is beyond essential if you've yet to experience a *Total War* game in all its glory.

Without doubt, *Shogun: Total War – Warlord Edition* (penny for penny) is one of the top five best buys currently on the shelves. Now I won't tell you again, you know what you have to do. Go now. NOW!

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

90



Three years old, but still incredible.

HOSTILE WATERS

■ Price: £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: September



Hostile Waters is one of the most overlooked games in recent history.

HOSTILE WATERS, I can happily assure you, has nothing to do with pissing razor blades. It has, however, got rather a lot to do with a sublime symbiosis of genres, superb gameplay and a compelling storyline with more twists than a perm.

It's an action/strategy *thaang*, and for some reason, only 11 people bought the game in this country. OK, more than 11, but you get the point. In fact, the low sales of *Hostile Waters* must go down as one of the greatest travesties of recent PC game buying trends.

Set in the future, where war no longer exists, a group of wannabe dictators somehow get their hands on some missiles and hardware and hold the world to ransom. Solution? Re-commission the

Antilus project, a self-contained battleship fitted with nanotechnology that can build new military hardware from scrap metal in seconds. Add to this the ability to upload the brains of past war veterans to pilot the crafts, and the fact that you can fight in any vehicle by your AI team's side and you already have a formidable game.

Then add an excellent strategy element, which allows you to play the whole game, purely as a commander if you so wish, and you've got one hell of a game. One that you'd do well to check out. Unless, of course, you're one of the 11 people who've already experienced this sublime gaming experience.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

84

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: September

DUNGEON Keeper 2 is the ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, where a normal day at work means pulling the wings off fairies, slapping your imps (no, that's not a euphemism) and generally fostering the cause of evil. The Bullfrog games have stood the test of time very well, mainly because they have created their own little sub-genre of simulation mixed with RTS in a way that hasn't been equalled since.

In *Dungeon Keeper 2* the dungeons are bigger, your monsters are meaner (who could forget the masochistic mistress?) and everything has been polished up since the previous game. The object is still the same: build an



That's right my pretties, gamble away.



impressive evil fortification, lure in some minions, train them up and send them after the good guys. A 'Possession' option also means you can take over any one of your creatures and view the evil workings of your dungeon for yourself in first-person mode.

What you'll be getting for your fiver is simply a great game, packed with humour and fantastic detail. The *Disco Inferno* bit is particularly good and if you don't know what I mean, you should find out. So buy yourself *Dungeon Keeper 2* and be enlightened.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

84

SOUL REAVER 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: September



Don't fall apart on me now.



Have you lost weight...?

TELL YOU WHAT, after wading through some of the more turgid moments from *Tomb Raider* last issue, it was a positive delight to return to this soul-sucking vampiric tale from yesteryear. Wandering through the game's dank swamps and gothic cathedrals, I was impressed by how fresh the whole thing still seems 18 months on. It's not a hugely groundbreaking effort by any means, but every part of the experience, from the graphics to the combat system to the puzzles, is 100 per cent rock-solid.

For newcomers to the world of reaving, this epic action/adventure puts you back in the role of undead ex-vampire Raziel, a vengeful character on a mission to assassinate his tormentor Kain. The

storyline, conveyed by frequent exchanges of corny gothic dialogue, is dense and involving, and like all good games contains a giant god-like squid engineering the destiny of vampire-kind.

The puzzle-solving elements are particularly good, hinging on trademark devices, such as shifting between planes (which comes with an impressive morphing effect), and the various powers of the *Soul Reaver*, an accursed weapon bonded immutably to Raziel's arm.

It's all good, fun stuff and comes with the added bonus of killing lots of people and sucking their souls.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT

85



See? Killing really is an artform.

HITMAN: CODENAME 47

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: September

IT WAS A bit of a graphical mess when it came out and the engine glitches are all the more apparent two years on – but there's still something deeply alluring about this amoral, hard-as-nails assassin simulation.

It's not exactly realistic – no one bats an eyelid at the piss-poor disguises that somehow turn a bald white killer into a Chinaman – and the controls are often clunky and uncomfortable. But it's amazing that this is still the best, some might say the only, representation of a fascinating profession one would think was tailor-made for games.

The sequel ballsed it up completely by turning it into another save-the-world-from-terrorists cliché, but in this first

outing you really are a cold-blooded killer garroting and sniping your way through levels to eliminate your target for money.

The story side of the game (where you discover your origin and the meaning of the number 47) is best ignored as it detracts from the real-world feel of it all, and turns it away from the likes of *Leon* and *Grosse Pointe Blank* to more hackneyed game-fare. The jungle levels suck too, but if you can find a cheat that lets you ignore those, there is a disturbing and original game to discover, even if it did fail to inspire other brave attempts at the genre.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

76

POPULOUS: THE BEGINNING

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

THE SECOND OF our two Bullfrog games this month is *Populous: The Beginning*, which takes the *Star Wars* route of being the prequel to its predecessors, despite being the third in the series.

The Beginning feels much more like a real-time strategy title than the previous games. The god-game idea is still there, although this time you have an earthly incarnation in the form of a magical female Shaman and the theme is more to do with manipulating people than the landscape (though you can still have some giant mystical bulldozing fun).

Through Little Miss Shaman you strive for a godlike status by bolstering your own tribe to become little fuzzy battle machines, then waging war against lots of other tribes that get in your way in order to conquer different areas.

The 3D engine is nowhere near as tasty as it was when the game was first released, but nevertheless the game is still smooth and fun to play, especially the spells, which range from the simple,



A snow-covered chubby little village.

such as Create Bridge, to full, apocalypse-style raining fireballs and spontaneous volcanic eruptions.

The general gaming premise hasn't weathered the years as well as the *Dungeon Keeper* and *Theme Hospital* games, simply because the RTS genre has since produced many similar titles, but it's still cheap and cheerful fun.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT

72

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

One corner of the *ZONE* office is a dark and murky place. Here an isolated collection of forlorn-looking CDs lie in teetering piles, uncared for. This is where old games go to die. Once a month an intrepid member of the team ventures into this barren graveyard. This month, it's me.

Today's subjects are in surprisingly good states of decomposition. First up is *SimCity 3000* (Dice Multimedia, £4.99, Out Now), which may have less options and graphical tomfoolery than *SimCity 4*, but still isn't bad for a measly fiver. And what's more, this version of the game from Dice Multimedia is half the price that EA is currently charging for theirs. 71 per cent.

Once upon a time *NHL 2000* (Dice Multimedia, £4.99, Out Now) was unbeatable, but even though the graphics are looking a bit rosey these days, the gameplay remains as frantic and entertaining as ever. It's still exciting and the manoeuvrability of your player still feels realistic. If you want a cheap introduction to the least banal of all American sports then this one's your monkey. 70 per cent.

Next up is *Incoming Forces* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). The variety of craft – some land-based, some air-based – makes up for the lack of atmosphere in this by-the-book shooter. It was pretty playable last year, and it's still vaguely playable now. 57 per cent.

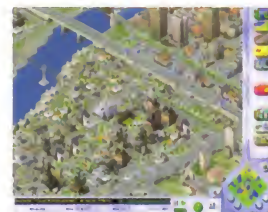
WipeOut seems to be a game that will forever be locked in the past, and *WipeOut 2097* (Dice Multimedia, £4.99, Out Now) is no different. You know the score: twisty tracks, pumping music, funny triangular flying things. Quite frankly, we're bored and want to go home. 44 per cent.

At the back of the wasteland, hiding behind a rock, we find *Adventure Pinball* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). It's diverting if not groundbreaking so we'll give it a friendly 53 per cent and say no more. Oh, and *Lemmings* for Windows (Dice Multimedia, £4.99, Out Now) was also lurking in the shadows. It looks ugly but is still mildly amusing. 55 per cent.

Will Porter



Lemmings



SimCity 3000



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FEEDBACK

Another month, another pile of feedback letters to wade through. **Martin Korda** gets reading

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree, or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will either not be considered, or may have to be edited for size.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

REVIEWED ISSUE: 131
SCORE: 95%

What we thought

"Phenomenal. One of the best PC games ever. *Vice City* is a title that has defined a generation – a videogame that's hugely entertaining and cool as f**k."

What you said

I bought *Vice City* having completed half of it on a mate's PS2 and I can't believe how much more fun it becomes simply with the addition of a



Rockstar's magnificent *GTA: Vice City* is now a PC big hitter.

PC, and it's even better. I've never been so happy to be proved wrong about a game. Everyone at Rockstar should be knighted for producing a game that defies belief.

P Cousins

form on the consoles for a while now. If you haven't bought it yet, don't waste another minute.

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

REVIEWED ISSUE: 131
SCORE: 74%

What we thought

"Provides plenty of action over a series of levels packed with varying *Star Trek* baddies. And if that's what you're after, you'll probably walk away just about satisfied when it's all over."

What you said

I reckon your reviewer was a bit harsh on *Elite Force II*. I agree that it's not anything particularly new but it's still a good, solid game with some excellent scripted sequences and weapons. So what if it doesn't rewrite the rulebook? We all know that's *Half-Life 2*'s job, so don't be so harsh on the also-rans! As far as I'm concerned *Elite Force II* improves on the original game in every available department. I'm only a casual *Trek* fan, so I'm not swayed by the geek vote, and I know a good game when I see one.

Joshua Carpenter

I think Mark Hill was right to say that originality in games is a rare thing, and his comments about this sequel were spot on. It's much the same as the last

one, only longer and more predictable. Scripted corridor shooters have had their day. Bring on *Half-Life 2*.

Bat

It's not groundbreaking and there's nothing new here. Ritual has just regurgitated *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* and packed it into a new box. While I still found this game to be fun, it was a disappointment overall, as I expected so much more from it.

Ed Mead

Comment

Elite Force II isn't a bad game, it's just predictable and somewhat flat. With a licence as rich as the *Star Trek* one, we expected a lot more than just another corridor shooter with aliens.

WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

REVIEWED ISSUE: 131
SCORE: 89%

What we thought

"With the pricing issue removed, all that's left to focus on is how well it plays, and this plays very well indeed."

What you said

Cheers for the *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* game you put on the discs last month. I was a bit put off at first as I thought it wasn't a standalone package, but once I got it going I was hooked. The mission structure in each map is sheer genius, especially the ones that require your team to move a vehicle over the map, and it's the first game I've ever seen where people willingly play as medics or engineers. I don't know if it's the new *Counter-Strike*, but it's the closest I've seen to it so far.

Stewart Stapleton

Damn you. Having spent the last two years lost in the world of *Counter-Strike*, I was slowly beginning to wean myself off it. Then I load up the disc from your August issue and find the full version of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*. Apprehensive at first, I gave it a go. Four hours later, I was still playing, healing my team-mates (yes it can actually be fun to play this way), as they held back the advancing Nazis. Now I'm hooked again thanks to you, and I'm loving it.

WolfAddict Anonymous

Comment

It's free so you can't complain. Oh, you're not. Well, that's good then. [L2]



Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory – the best freebie ever?

"I spend ages burning around the beaches rocking out to classic '80s stadium anthems"

KEVIN GALLAGHER ON HIS LOVE FOR HANGING OUT ON HIS HARLEY IN *GTA: VICE CITY*

mouse and keyboard. My PC isn't that athletic these days, so I did have a few problems with pop-up, but I am convinced that shoot-outs are ten times more fun without the targeting system that is necessary on the PS2. I really like having the ability to play my own MP3s on the radio too. I spend ages just burning around the beaches on a Harley rocking out to classic 80s stadium anthems!

Kevin Gallagher

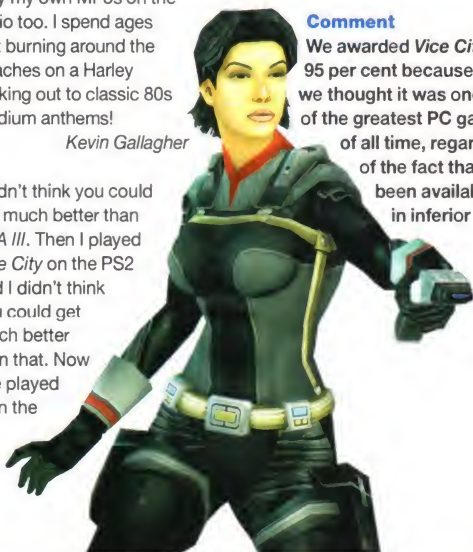
I didn't think you could get much better than *GTA III*. Then I played *Vice City* on the PS2 and I didn't think you could get much better than that. Now I've played it on the

You must be taking the piss. 95 per cent for *GTA: Vice City*? Sure, it's a great game, but it's been available on consoles for a year or so, and in my opinion, it's not that much different to *GTA III*. I'd give it 89 per cent, at a push.

John B

Comment

We awarded *Vice City* 95 per cent because we thought it was one of the greatest PC games of all time, regardless of the fact that it's been available in inferior



WHAT'S A REALITY CHECK?

Reality Check is a monthly feature comparing PC games to their real-life equivalents. Or at least, as close as we can get without risking serious bodily harm.

REALITY CHECK: CASINO GAMES

Letting **PC ZONE** loose in a casino was a massive gamble. **Steve Hill** deals out the words

NOW THEN. A tenuous Reality Check, you say? Next time you're in your local games emporium, check out the number of gambling games clogging up the shelves, not to mention the vast amount of online casinos. The reason that they rarely feature in these pages is that those played 'just for fun' are pointless, and those that involve losing thousands of pounds to an unseen banker are not really suitable. In fact, the only decent gambling game we can think of is the ancient *Vegas Girls*, in which success on the tables was rewarded with rudimentary footage of strippers disrobing. Much as we'd have liked to replicate that, the photography may have presented a problem.

Latterly though, casinos and PC gaming have collided in a more orthodox fashion, with

the glamorous world of gambling providing the basis of a number of Tycoon games. With this as our cue, it's a suave bunch of *ZONE* representatives that heads to a local venue, resplendent in pressed trousers, ironed shirts and freshly-buffed shoes. We needn't have bothered. Far from the mecca of international playboys we had expected, it's more like a working men's club. Not so much James Bond as James Pond. Even resident working class hero (well, lower middle class),

Jamie Sefton, is appalled, admitting: "I feel overdressed. I should have worn a purple shellsuit."

Deflated, we seek solace in the bar-cum-restaurant, which seems to have been based on an airport departure lounge, only with worse food. From microwave to table in 20 minutes, it's Chicken Baltis all round, with the exception of Korda, who hasn't been seen since we arrived.

BLACK MATH

Girded by strong lager, we head for the tables, negotiating the rows of slot machines into which unblinking women are routinely emptying their purses. The mystery of the missing Korda is solved, as he has adopted a trance-like pose at the nearest roulette table, fingering his chips while eyeing the



VS



THE REAL DEAL

SO HOW REAL ARE CASINO GAMES, REALLY?

Due to legal reasons we can't mention the name or location of the casino that we visited (some bollocks about the Gambling Act of 1412 or something), neither can we divulge the name of the manager we spoke to about how running a casino compares to real life. "The importance of machine placement is minimal," he began, "it's more of a case of getting as much in as possible." What even next to the bogs? "If there's space there, sure." And what about the clientele, can you have troublesome punters like in the games? "We've got our regulars, who we get to know quite well, but sometimes we get some real nut cases in. One time this guy claimed the roulette wheel was rigged after reds came up a few times in a row and demanded his money back. He just went mad." Did you beat him up? "Let's just say he won't be coming back here again." That's a yes then.

HOW REAL IS... VEGAS GIRLS

SHOW US YOUR BUM FOR A POUND



Like a real casino, you play the slots, black jack and roulette. Unlike a real casino, when you win, you get to watch a stripper take her kit off. As if. You'd have to go to East London for that.

wheel with the intensity of a beast stalking its prey. There is no talking to him, although after a couple of enquiries he sternly announces "three quid down," at no time unfixing his gaze from the table. Considering he could kill a man with his bare hands, we collectively decide that he'd be best left to it.

The crux of the recent spate of casino games involves attracting a variety of clientele to your premises, from trailer trash to millionaires, and it's clearly the former category that is prevalent here. But what about ourselves? Let's be honest, despite our lack of sovereign rings and amateur dentistry, we are scarcely a cut above the rest of the slack-jawed losers in here. However, in Konami's *Casino Inc*, there's a

category of punter described as media high-rollers, and it is this mantle that one of us ludicrously assumes, thanks to an extraordinary run of luck.

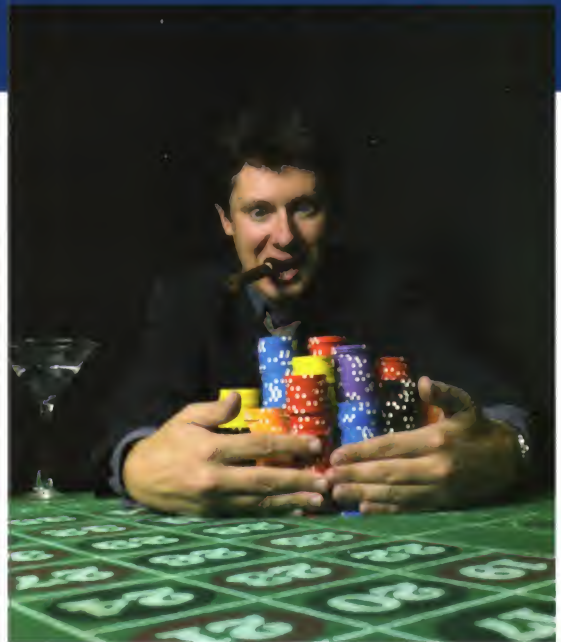
SHOW ME THE MONEY

Finding an empty table – apart from a cigar-smoking leather man – we cautiously buy some £1 chips. Woods leads the way, naively selecting a single number, and even surrounding it with four lots of £2. Sensationally, on the first spin it comes in, netting him £100 before the rest of us have even taken a seat. Absurdly, like in some kind of dream sequence, he pulls off the same bet within three spins, causing even the stoney-faced floor manager to raise his eyebrows. Quite extraordinary.

Elsewhere, Presley is doing his own thing and Sefton is flinching at the loss of every pound, claiming "This is worth about £130 up north." I, meanwhile, have a time-honoured system of playing the even chances, and doubling up after every loss. However, given the £5 minimum bet and the risible float I've been given by Korda (£20), it proves unworkable, and I spent the entire visit in deficit, finally pulling it round to a fiver up before retiring to bait Korda, reminding him that his last train is minutes away. "There's always a back-up," the behemoth retorts. Half an hour later he is asking, "Have you got contact lens solution at your house?" Which certainly surprises the croupier.

With Woods' early luck having long since deserted him, we retire to the bar – apart from Korda – to tot up the damage. Amazingly, there is only one casualty, Sefton having blown £20, the equivalent of a two-bedroom house in his native Yorkshire. Presley is a tenner to the good, and Woods has managed to salvage £70 from his early windfall. A shadow falls across the table, and Korda finally emerges with a face like thunder. The damage? "Five quid up." Not bad for two hours work.

Nevertheless, there's no denying that we have beaten the casino. The bad news is that we are now all members. That said, if there's no *PC ZONE* next month you'll know that our luck is in. This time next year we'll be millionaires (or playing games for coins). **PCZ**



Freelance? Fuggedaboutit...

HOW REAL IS... CASINO INC.

HEAD IN A VICE, ANYONE?



This is the last call for the flight to Barbados.

Set in a dark '70s American city, this is more of a cartoon take on the world of casinos, featuring the seedy side of gambling such as beating up the competition. The casinos also feature attractive escorts, unlike the shit-hole we visited.

HOW REAL IS... VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

VIVA LAS VEGAS



The best casino game yet?

Shaping up nicely (currently at advanced Beta stage), this looks like being the definitive casino-based game. Utilising a version of developer Deep Red's *Monopoly Tycoon* engine, the action will take place both inside casinos and on the streets of modern day Las Vegas.

"We head for the tables, negotiating rows of slot machines into which unblinking women are routinely emptying their purses"



VIRGIN LOVES

PC DVD-ROM



Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance
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PC CD-ROM



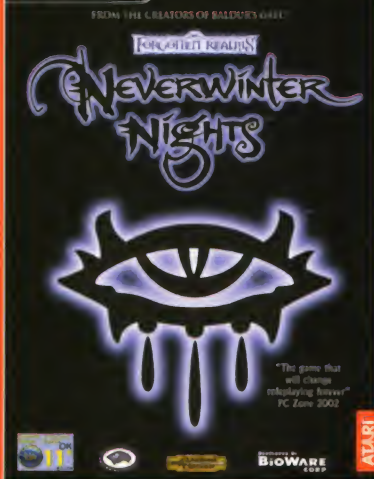
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PC CD-ROM



Unreal II: The Awakening
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PC CD-ROM



Neverwinter Nights
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Master Of Orion 3
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PC CD-ROM



Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield
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BUY ONE GET ONE FREE



IL2: Sturmovik
£29.99



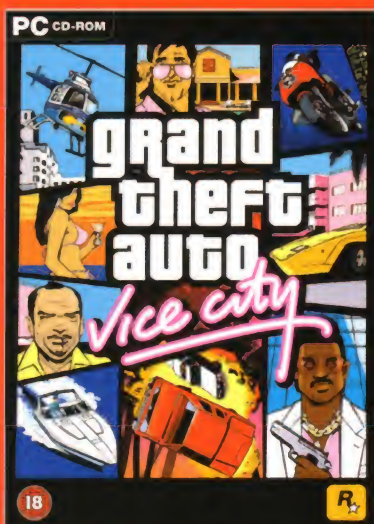
Morrowind Gold: The Elder Scrolls III
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I.G.I. 2 Covert Strike
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Vietcong
£29.99



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
£34.99



Toca Race Driver
£34.99

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

DROP THE GUN



■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ You know something's wrong when the urge to kill has gone. Maybe it's these hot summer days sapping my strength, maybe it's the return of my beloved Arsenal diverting my competitive spirit, maybe it's that continually being the first one with a 'DEAD' tag next to his *Counter-Strike* name has finally gotten to me. All I know is, I'm looking for something less destructive in my online gaming.

Which is why games such as *A Tale In The Desert* (see page 104) are all the more welcome, encouraging creativity, social intercourse and personal development over mindless monster hacking. Trying to describe the concept around the office has produced a few sceptical looks ("You build Egypt? That's it? Can't you blow up your neighbours' kilns?"), but as Rhianna explains in the review, sometimes it's good to turn the swords into ploughshares.

Not that we're ignoring the more mainstream titles of course. One of the most popular, *Anarchy Online*, is about to get a major content update with hand-crafted dungeons and brand new character classes. We take a deeper look on page 100.

We've also got an inside look at the long-awaited graphics-fest that is *Final Fantasy XI Online*. Most of you will have experienced the classic RPG series at some point over in console land, but how is it going to hold up against the PC's more, ahem, sophisticated titles? Square Enix isn't short of ideas, that's for sure. Its website has a 'live' webcam feed from within the game – surely the way forward.

That'll have to do you for now. My camels are getting restless and the Pharaoh's coming over for dinner tonight. Busy place, Egypt.

Illuminating concepts in Dark And Light

A DOZEN FRENCHMEN ATTEMPT TO MAKE THE LARGEST VIRTUAL WORLD EVER



This'll be the 'light' bit, presumably.

FOR SOME, the search for a different take on the world of MMOGs means developing intricate new forms of character design. For some, it means elaborate skill systems and combat routines. For others, like the folks at NP Cube, it simply means making it big. Bigger, in fact, than any previous MMOG to date. In one of those intriguing little twists that Alanis Morissette would sing about, the 15,000 square mile terrain that makes up the world of *Dark And Light* is being developed by a team of twelve on the tiny French-owned Reunion Island, just off the coast of Madagascar.

15,000 square miles is a lot of area to fill (apparently, even the developers have lost count of how many villages, towns and the

like exist within the game world), but helping every inch of it remain intriguing is a revolutionary graphics engine that utilises a degree of randomisation and organic rendering to ensure no texture is repeated. A bold claim, although given the size of the world, one that's not likely to ever be effectively verified.

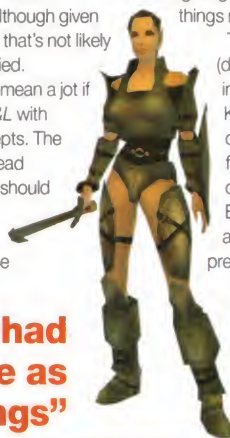
None of which would mean a jot if NP Cube wasn't filling *D&L* with interesting gaming concepts. The 14 character classes spread across 12 different races should keep the statisticians among you happy, although it's the way these characters develop that

provides the real hook. Experience comes in two forms – fighting and social – meaning there'll be as much fun to be had from fighting the political battle as from hitting things repeatedly with a halberd.

The world is made up of two factions (dark and light, you see), segmented into a strict hierarchal structure.

Kingdoms contain baronies, duchies, counties, cities, towns and fortresses, each waiting to be conquered in the fight for power.

Beta testing begins in September, and we'll be bringing you a full preview later this year. ☑



"There's as much fun to be had from playing the political game as there is from hitting things"



A magnificent view. And so is her arse.



"Saruman, is that you?"

■ Publisher: TBA
■ Developer: NP Cube
■ ETA: 2004
■ Website: www.darkandlight.com



FINAL FANTASY XI
The Japanese MMOG of choice



A TALE IN THE DESERT
Build like an Egyptian



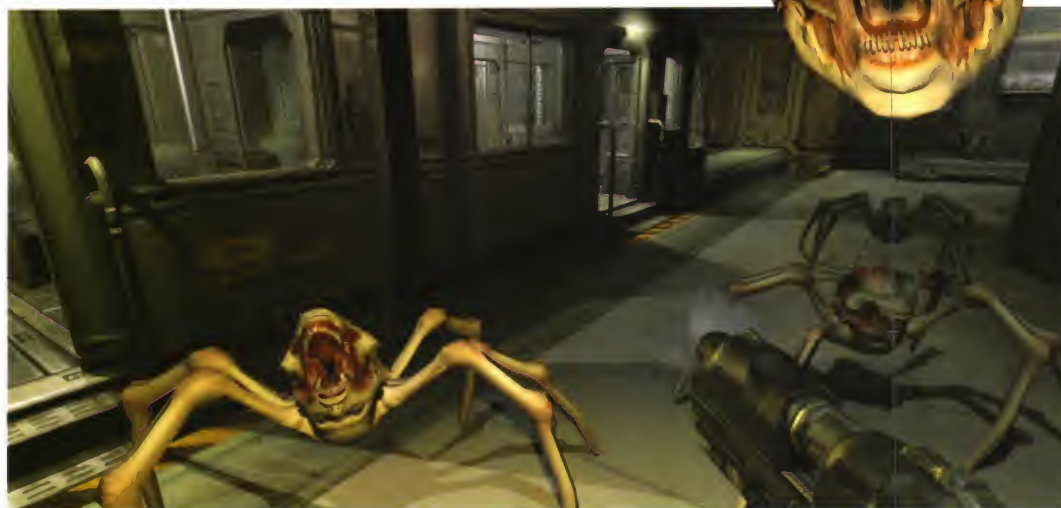
PLANETSIDE
Get started with basic training



NEVERQUEST
Steve Hill goes to war

QUAKECON IS DOOMED

FOUR-PLAYER *DOOM 3* DEATHMATCH GETS FIRST AIRING AT TEXAN FAN CONVENTION



A gang of spidery-demon thingies. Unlikely to be playable characters.

FANS OF relentless, uncompromising, some might say hardcore first-person deathmatch shooters were given a recent boost with the announcement that id Software was going to be showing off *Doom 3*'s multiplayer capabilities at QuakeCon 2003.

The four-day event, which took place in Dallas, Texas, on August 14-17, gave fans

of the classic massacre 'em up their first taste of the four-player deathmatch action that's being co-developed by the UK's own Splash Damage Ltd, previously responsible for the lunchtime and bandwidth-sapping *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*.

Some have questioned the quality of *Doom 3*'s multiplayer potential, and certainly the limitation of catering for only four players

in deathmatch mode has caused speculation to run rampant. With the event taking place just prior to this issue's deadline, we've made sure that our man was firmly on the scene and using every ounce of his journalistic self-importance to push to the front of the queues. We'll bring you a full report next month - check www.quakecon.org for updates.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



Ghost egg men? Stripy ball lover? Wasted years at art college?

ISKETCH

(WWW.ISKETCH.NET)

I hate drawing. Rolf Harris used to maintain that any fool can draw a straight line. Years ago he fixed his gaze on me during an episode of Rolf's Cartoon Time and challenged me to pick up a pencil and prove him wrong. So I did. Thanks Rolf. One innocent child's hopes and dreams shattered as an unintended S-curve wobbled across the paper. No, I couldn't tell what it was yet.

Fortunately, I'm not alone. Seems the Internet is chock-full of cack-handed doodlers, and *iSketch* is their home. Think *Pictionary*. Think IRC. Real-time guess-the-drawing action, with rooms covering topics as diverse as movies, videogames and Portuguese food. Pick a subject, and join the fun guessing whether the random squiggles mean *The Terminator* or *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Once you get going, *iSketch* is addictive time-wasting fun in that 'just one more go before I get back to work - whoops, is it really 6pm already?' sort of way. The ability to create your own rooms lends it an air of community, although you should be advised that most of the custom rooms have become teen and/or sex chat forums, with the business of *iSketching* remaining firmly in the background.

Fortunately, the regular rooms are chock-a-block with legitimate artists and the palpable air of tension that invades your body when the virtual pen is thrust into your hand and you've got 60 seconds to think of a way to represent *The Long Good Friday* in pictorial form. Rolf would be proud of my efforts, though.

ONLINE SHORTS

NEWS TO KEEP THE NET CHAT FORUMS BUZZING



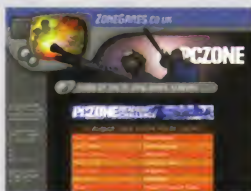
BF: BRITAIN

EA has delighted fans of the Second World War II by producing a whole new map for the online shooter of choice that is *BF 1942*. Based around the Battle Of Britain. It sees the Axis troops attempting to bomb the Allies back to the stone age. Get it from www.planetbattlefield.com now.



EDIT IT

Still on the expansion front, Splash Damage has released the official *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* map editor for budding level designers to play with. It's a complicated beastie, to be sure, but then so is the online shooter that's eating away at our lunch hours. Grab it from www.splashdamage.com.



SITE NEWS

Speaking of *Enemy Territory*, you'll be pleased to hear that the PC ZONE public game servers have been updated. Along with the usual C-S, UT and TFC action, we've now added *W:ET*, the increasingly popular *Monkey Strike* and the *Desert Combat* mod for *BF1942*. Check out www.zonegames.co.uk.



WEB SHOTS

Ever since *SoccerSim* died a while back, we've been searching for a decent online footie management sim. Now we've found two of 'em. *VirtuallySport.com* is a lavish subscription affair (review next month), while *Hattrick.org* is a simpler, mainly text, free-to-play effort. Worth a look if *CM4* makes you feel lonely.



Beta testing is almost upon the team.

DEVELOPER DIARY



DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters

"The first phase of beta testing is now underway and the studio is getting busier. Programmers are staying late to complete their work and the artists are excitedly putting the pieces of their work together and admiring the results.

"We've just completed some exciting sections of gameplay that we're sure everyone will love. The main element is 'Formal Battle', where you and your team can challenge another team (or teams!) to an organised fight. In this fight an arena is created and a 'game' starts. The fights end up a bit like a scene from *Gladiator* and feature one of several different mini-games. These include King of the Hill, Protect the Leader, Capture the Item and so on. These should be a lot of fun for players who want to get some quick action, and what's more we'll reward the winning team with gold and experience points to make it really worthwhile.

"While most of the team has been focusing on what happens above ground, a few have been looking at what goes on below. Last week we saw our first demo of the dungeon engine and it's simply fantastic! Everything from boiling lava to caverns made entirely of crystal were on show and we can't wait to see some of our

"Last week we saw our first demo of the dungeon engine and it's simply fantastic!"

dungeons take shape. We really feel that exploring *Dragon Empires* is going to be a thrill even for the most jaded of gamers.

"Our new character models are also just about complete. The three races are looking very exciting and our artists have had a great time creating them. We're trying some stuff that gamers haven't seen before in an MMORPG, including body paint and tattoos that you can wear. When you use a body paint item you'll find yourself covered in colourful painted patterns that may offer magical enhancements. Tattoos can range from huge sweeps of ink through to small, intricate patterns, and both tattoos and body paint will really help characters stand out and look unique.

"Anyway, I better get back to our beta test. Next time I'll tell you how our first few weeks of testing have gone. Till then!"



Laser Squad Hits Retail

THE CLASSIC EMAIL STRATEGY TITLE FINALLY GETS FULL RELEASE

IT SEEMS LIKE we've been waiting an eternity for Richie's favourite game in the world (ever) to make the jump from cult, downloadable classic to full-on buy-it-in-the-shops retail heaven, but the wait finally appears to be over.

Just Play – the gaming offshoot of flight sim specialist, Just Flight – has announced it's tied up the rights to publish the brilliant *Laser Squad Nemesis* from August 20, bringing the intense play-by-email title to the masses like never before at the generous price of £12.99.

Originally the plan had been to boost the retail version with a full single-player mode and to add a fourth race, the Greys, to the mix. While the latter enhancement is still set to appear, it seems the challenge of creating convincing single-player AI was too much and so it'll just be the vanilla two-player version that goes on sale. To make up for it, Just Play will be running LSN leagues and tournaments for you to participate in.

- **Publisher:** Just Play
- **Developer:** Codo Technologies
- **ETA:** August 20
- **Website:** www.lasersquadnemesis.com



Better than the usual "Cheap Viagra" emails.



Making your inbox more exciting than ever.

COMPETITION

To help celebrate *Laser Squad Nemesis*' move into retail, Just Play has generously offered to give away TEN copies of the game to you lucky readers. All you have to do to get your hands on the online classic is answer the following question:

Which classic strategy series did the Gollop Brothers produce during the late '90s?

A: X-COM B: S-COM C: S-CLUB



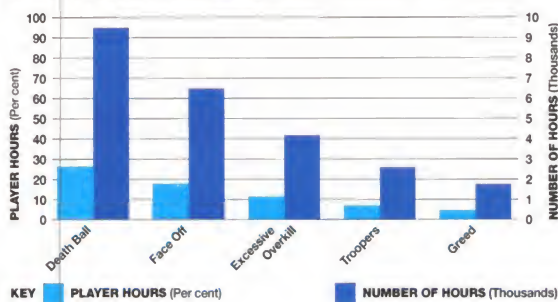
Send your answer on the back of a postcard to:
Laser Squad Nemesis Competition, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street,
London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: Wednesday, September 17, 2003).

Terms and Conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. All the other competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. Your house is at risk if you do not keep up payments. Investments can go up as well as down. Not sideways though, that's illogical. Loans subject to status. The editor's decision is final.

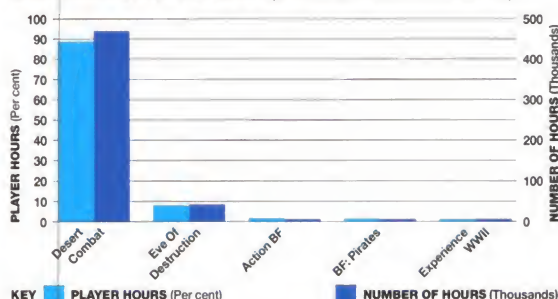
STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

MOST POPULAR UT2003 MODS (WEEK ENDING 28TH JULY, 2003)



MOST POPULAR BF1942 MODS (WEEK ENDING 28TH JULY, 2003)



RELATIVE POPULARITY OF GLOBAL ONLINE GAMING
(BASED ON POPULATION SIZE VERSUS TIME ONLINE PER HEAD OF POPULATION)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

AATISH SALVI, Director Of Production, *Middle Earth Online*

THE JOURNEY BETWEEN good and evil has always been at the heart of Middle Earth, Tolkien's characters forever battling the demons within as well as without. Tasked with recreating the epic world for 2004's launch of *Middle Earth Online*, Turbine Games' Aatish Salvi knows full well how important it is to make sure this comes across in the game. "Meaningful choices are the definition of real role-playing and are missing from most RPG games today," he explains from the team's offices in Massachusetts. "In *MEO*, every decision you make changes who you are and how the world reacts to you. Should you choose to wield a corrupt item or use powers that rely on domination and cruelty, you'll find the world senses the taint of shadow on you."

It's a world that Salvi and his team

are relishing creating. Players can own houses in the heart of the Shire, walk into the Prancing Pony, see the Nazgul in their dark glory and brave the haunted depths of Moria. "Having a source as rich as Tolkien's means that our quests, our storyline and our environment get to draw on the best fantasy literature there is," he says excitedly. "Where else could you find a place as enchanting as Rivendell, a race as poignant as Tolkien's elves or demons more fierce and regal than the Balrog?"

The fan-favourite realm of Rivendell in particular is a source of pride for Turbine, with Salvi insisting: "It will be simply breathtaking. Elven craftsmanship relies heavily on earthy natural forms and colours, while possessing a high sense of grace and intricacy. The concepts that our artists have done promise it will have the sense of grandeur and ageless beauty that Tolkien associated with this

race." This land of grace and elegance is something close to Salvi's own personal desire. "I have to admit," he says, "ever since I was ten it's been my dream to wake up in the morning in the House of Elrond and have the city of Rivendell for a window view."

As a dark counterpoint to the splendour of the elves, Tolkien's less welcoming locales are looking equally impressive. Moria has a particularly oppressive air of doom and gloom about it according to Salvi. "The darkness of a Dwarven tomb over-run with Orc marauders isn't exactly comforting. And the deep, booming drums from the depths begin to wear down your sanity after a while."

- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** Turbine Games
- **ETA:** Summer 2004
- **Website:** www.middle-earthonline.com

"Having a source as rich as Tolkien's means that our quests, our storyline and our environment get to draw on the best fantasy literature there is"

AATISH SALVI Director Of Production, *Middle Earth Online*

PICZONE 97



The dangers of fighting surreal vulturemen after taking hallucinogenics.

Saddle your chocobo, it's...

FINAL FANTASY XI: ONLINE

Russ Fischer swallows his pride to beta test the biggest console port ever

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Square Enix
PUBLISHER Sony
WEBSITE www.playonline.com/f11us
ETA Winter 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Flashy combat effects that actually influence gameplay
- Draws from a game design pool that's decades deep
- Customisable job/class system to accommodate diverse playing styles
- Less emphasis on simply surviving battle, and more on story and ideas

I'M MAN enough that I can begin with an admission. Back in 1997, I scraped together some cash and bought a PlayStation. I had some time on my hands (alright, I'd been sacked), so I also brought home *Final Fantasy VII*. Much to the amusement of friends and peers, that game was played to death. Every single secret was ferreted out, with nary a glance at a strategy guide. But after the full splendour of that success, the series held no further interest for me. At least not until Square Enix unleashed *Final Fantasy XI*, the first MMOG in the long-running series. The game has been available to Japanese

PC and PlayStation 2 owners since late 2002, but only recently began beta testing elsewhere in the world on Windows platforms.

ART HISTORY

Looking at this game coming down the pipe, it's easy to see a turf war brewing. On one side are the currently dominant titles, led by *EverQuest*. Facing off is this upstart, with more than a dozen previous releases and literally decades of development to draw upon. Other entries in the series have sported everything from super-deformed anime characters to the more realistic designs

of *Final Fantasy X*. The online adventure runs with the latter style, though to keep the vocal die-hards happy, the designers have included the Tarutaru, a gibberish-spouting playable race of magically inclined bobble-heads to live alongside humans, elves and the like.

The game world is a blend of familiar and somewhat alien fantasy elements called Vana'diel, a fantasy land divided into three kingdoms. A great war has recently ended, leaving each government subtly jockeying for power. That's where you come in. Upon entering the game, you'll have to declare allegiance to one of the



He'll regret that in the morning.



The cuter they are, the louder they squeal.

THE NEWBIE DIET

GOOD FOR THE GOOSE, GOOD FOR THE GANDER...



That'll learn ya to be all cute and furry.

Since *EverQuest*'s rat-killing ladder to success worked so well, *FFXI* doesn't deviate from the pattern. They've tossed the rodents in favour of bumblebees and mutated jackrabbits, but the end result is the same. Thankfully, the time spent eliminating vermin has refined the system. The balance is better here, and you won't have to spend quite as much time on the pathetically low-level beasts before moving steadily up to more interesting critters. But hey, there's nothing like spending ten levels effectively killing butterflies with a bazooka to get you ready for real combat.

"No other MMOG looks anything like *Final Fantasy XI: Online*"

anything like it, nor one that moves as quickly. *FFXI* has adapted the limit break system from *Final Fantasy VII*, which presents you with a third energy bar to watch, on top of health and magic points. In combat, the gauge increases with each hit and as it maxes out, various combo and special attacks become available. The meter tops out at 300 per cent, and the higher it gets, the more damage will be dealt by your devastating special attacks. Along with special job-related abilities, these specials are the core of combat.

PROBLEM SOLVING

As you wander through the lush fields and streams and dank dungeons, some glaring omissions do presently stand out. Where, for instance, is the player killing, or the corpse-guarding? Fortunately, you won't have to track down your dead carcass when some punk bumblebee takes you apart, as dying is a relatively low-impact affair – simply costing some experience points, unless a kind mage is on hand to raise you from the dead. Dying is cheap, sure, but having to trudge back to battle is more fun when you're not preoccupied with the fear of looters.

There are a few legitimate causes for concern though. The camera control is still a bit wonky, mostly in battle, and being able to manoeuvre the view more dramatically during a fight would come in handy. More than that, however, is the density of the menu system. Truth be told, there's a lot going on, much of which is ably handled, but currently it's much too difficult to ask someone to join a party or add them to a friend list. The commands are there,

but buried in menus or the large collection of chat shortcuts. Attribute some of the blame to the PlayOnline wrapper, which offers many features in a console-friendly interface that could use a few nips and tucks.

Strangely, while the series has always been characterised with strikingly colourful graphics, *FFXI* has a somewhat washed-out look. The palette is subdued, with the exception of brightly flaring spell effects. Many backgrounds are downright grainy, even using uncompressed textures. However, the consistently interesting designs do make the look easy to get used to. And surprisingly, most of my time in the beta was lag-free. There will be a monthly fee, currently set to compete with *EverQuest* and the like. The fee will buy one character, but for a small additional premium more can be yours. Start saving now – the battle between addictions begins in November. [C]

CV

SQUARE ENIX

SQUARE ENIX

The result of a merger between Japan's dual RPG giants, Squaresoft and Enix. Since the mid '80s both have thrived, until escalating costs forced these rival schools to unite

1986 *Dragon Quest* (Enix) was the first console RPG, originally on the Famicom in Japan, then retooled for release on the western NES.

1991 *Final Fantasy IV* (Square) wasn't released outside of Japan, but has continually topped lists as the best of the series, with a highly flexible and customisable character system.

1997 *Final Fantasy VII* (Square) becomes the biggest selling RPG in western history, crossing over into mainstream culture with dramatic animation and 3D.

2000 *Dragon Quest VII* (Enix) was far less linear than competing titles from Square, with a huge variety of character options and free gameplay that predated more advanced titles.

three. As you fight monsters outside of town, you'll increase the holdings of your homeland, in addition to lining your own pockets. The years of back story really shine through, as Vana'diel already feels like a fully developed culture with extensive guilds and plenty of history.

NOT JUST A DEAD-END JOB

There are two different task structures in *FFXI*. 'Missions' are state-sponsored jobs that form the bulk of the storyline, and offer rank rewards. Alternately, 'quests' are often errand-based affairs, doled out by NPCs in town. They're optional, but recommended. While many quests may be undertaken alone, missions run at a much higher difficulty, and will require you to party up with others. The need to share ill-gotten gains with others is far preferable to the loneliness of constant death.

Whether solo or party-based, battles are all real time, characterised by the garishly colourful weapon and spell effects that are the series' trademark. There's not another MMOG that looks



The higher the levels, the bigger the monsters, the tighter the leotards.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Funcom
WEBSITE www.anarchy-online.com
ETA August 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Static dungeons appear for the first time in AO
- Two new professions and more than 20 new playfields
- Faction system with a true 'endgame' for high-level players
- Outdoor and structured questing as opposed to randomly generated missions
- Updated graphics engine

An Anthony Hopkins MMOG?

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

So, you're level 200 with nowhere to go. What's next?
Chris Anderson lights the way forward

HARDCORE online gamers, bless their hearts, have created an anomaly entirely of their own making in which they systematically set about destroying whatever entertainment there is to be had in every game they play. They manage this by logging in and dedicating every waking moment to reaching the highest possible level as soon as humanly possible. Minor details such as sleep, food, and personal hygiene are all duly ignored in their dogged determination to be 'the highest' on their server. Then, when their goal is achieved at breathtaking speed, they complain they have nothing to do. How ironic.

There are exceptions, of course. There are players who take their time and seek out whatever content is on offer and explore every nook and cranny, enjoying the ride along the

way to the top. But generally speaking, this mass race to level X is the norm.

Anarchy Online has a level cap of 200, which is pretty high, even given the speed of levelling in the game. But it matters not whether the level cap is 200 or 2,000 – players will reach it no matter how difficult it may be, and when this happens, for these players at least, it's more or less game over. Enter stage left, *Shadowlands*.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Shadowlands takes *Anarchy Online* in many new directions. The random missions generated in Rubi-ka for players who just want to log on for a quick fix still remain, but in *Shadowlands*, an entirely new system will be in place. A faction tracker will keep tabs on how players stand within their own organisations, and through

CV



FUNCOM

Funcom was formed in 1993, but despite critical acclaim for *The Longest Journey* it did not make its mark on PC until it launched *Anarchy Online*

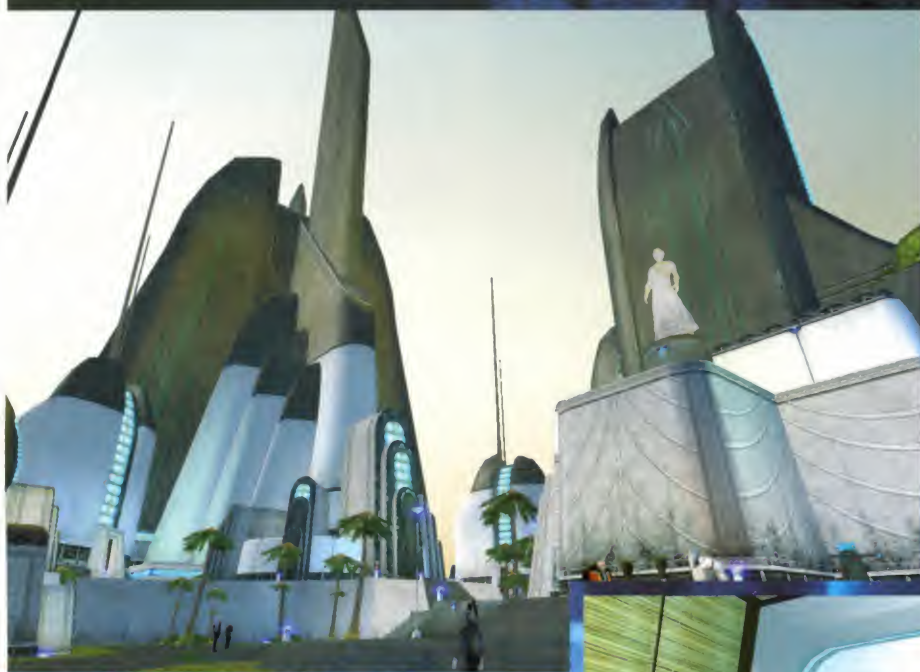
1995 *Casper* – a puzzle/adventure aimed (presumably) at younger players.

1995 *Dragonheart* – fantasy-based platformer. Jumping around was involved.

1999 *The Longest Journey* – sadly overlooked adventure title, still well worth a play even now.

2001 *Anarchy Online* – the first, and arguably best, futuristic online RPG.





Cities boast impressive new architecture.



This season's Next catalogue features some bold new looks.

a long and varied quest path, the best players will be able to unlock Shadowbreeds, gaining immense power as a result. This is the new *Anarchy Online* endgame, and it's a damned good one in concept.

STATIC SHOCK

There are, of course, new dungeons in this expansion, but gone are the slightly ramshackle cut-and-paste missions thrown up by the old random generator. In their place you'll find hand-crafted static dungeons, each with their own theme and design, and each with their own carefully thought-out challenges and rewards.

This is a complete turn-around for Funcom, who must surely be expecting the inevitable comparisons to *EverQuest* with these new static dungeons. But in our opinion it's a giant step in the right direction. Funcom has even recruited the talents of *Doom 2* and *Quake* level designers, which demonstrates the company's commitment to creating dungeons which challenge and surprise.

There are also two new professions, the Shade and the Keeper, who are both connected to a struggle between good and evil to unlock the secrets of an ancient civilisation – which is the general theme of the whole expansion pack. The Keeper is one of the 'good' guys, a fighter with group support skills, while the Shade is a loner more attuned to magic and evil skills. Since both can only be started in the Shadowlands region, choosing one of

"You'll find hand-crafted static dungeons, each with their own challenges and rewards"

these classes to make your way through the new playfields once it goes live would seem to make sense.

Visually, while *Anarchy Online* was undoubtedly a graphical trend-setter when it was released two years ago, it's beginning to look a bit sub-par when compared to games like *Asheron's Call 2* and *Planetside*. To this end,

Dinner parties are still hellish.

Shadowlands brings with it a graphics overhaul of considerable proportions. Higher polygon counts for the AO graphics engine allows for more detailed landscapes and environments, while a general overhaul on the textures, creating gleaming armour and leathery monster hides, further ups the ante for the visual upgrade.

However, the most interesting thing about *Shadowlands* at this point, is the fact that the game was originally scheduled to be released at the end of July, but was then put back another month while Funcom worked on the finer details. There was fear that it would slip even further, which goes to show just how committed Funcom is to getting the launch right this time (the

bugs, lack of planning and technical blow-ups encountered around AO's initial release led it to being dubbed one of the most botched in MMOG history). Fortunately the development team has just slapped the gold stamp on the code as we go to press and everything looks OK from here. We'll have a full review next issue. **PCZ**



Q&A

JØRGEN THARALDSEN



Jørgen is certainly a busy chap. Not only is he a product manager at Funcom, and as such involved in most of their titles, he is also responsible for writing many of the actual quests in *Shadowlands*.

PCZ What's the best game you've ever played?

JT Picking one is impossible, but *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* is among my all-time highs.

PCZ What's the worst game you've ever played?

JT I've collected and written about games for ten years, and there are so many bad ones. The worst games I've played recently are *Enter The Matrix* and *Hulk*. I wish the licensed games would take the customers more seriously.

PCZ Take this crystal ball and tell us about the future of MMOGs.

JT They will continue to grow for a long time, and will continue to become more immersive as the base set of features and possibilities increases. I believe they will be far more dynamic (building stuff and influencing the world), as well as having some amazing graphics.

PCZ What are you playing at the moment and why?

JT Right now I am playing *Silent Hill 3* (so far it's excellent).

PCZ What's your most memorable gaming moment?

JT I was so hooked on *Heroes Of Might & Magic II* I nearly went mad from lack of sleep. I played around the clock for days. I went to work in the mornings, but went home for lunch every day to get those precious ten minutes. It was a great time, too bad the series was 'destroyed'.



Bash the Bosch or take down Tommy – it's up to you.



World War I, yesterday.



Fokkers are one of eight flyable planes.

Bye-bye bi-plane

DAWN OF ACES III

Biplanes, blimps and certain death? Daniel Emery explores the wacky world of WWI flight sims...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER IEN
PUBLISHER Total Simulation Series
WEBSITE www.totalsims.com
ETA Late 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The best looking WWI flight sim to date
- A huge number of players online, in theory at least
- Accurate physics, damage modelling and ballistics
- Definite room for expansion – both in terms of aircraft choices and strategy



Virtual cockpits, real terror.

IT MIGHT not be a second golden age, but the flight sim market has been given a new lease of life by *IL-2: Forgotten Battles*, *Aces High* and numerous *Microsoft Flight Simulator* titles. That said, there is one genre missing from this list – WWI flight sims. Something which IEN hopes to rectify with *Dawn Of Aces III*.

DoA started life as a spin-off from the once-successful *WarBirds* series. The developer realised that it had a perfectly good game engine, with accurate physics, modelling and gunnery. All it needed to do was exchange airframes, alter some skins and quicker than you can say, "over the top lads" you've got a World War I flight sim.

There was only one small problem: *WarBirds* and *DoA* were both massively multiplayer flight sims and they were no longer the only shop on the street. *Aces*



Perfect for wing-walking fun.

High, *WWII Online* and *IL-2 Sturmovik* all slowly eroded a finite market, and the numbers in *WarBirds* dropped from an average of more than 300 every night to less than 50. Even the release of the much-improved *WarBirds III* has done little to stop the decline, so what chance has the new *Dawn Of Aces III* got?

Graphically, *DoAIII* is up there with the best. The aircraft look great and the



No seatbelts meant aerobatics had their drawbacks.

physics modelling is top notch. It's not quite up to *IL-2*'s standards, but it's close. Set in 1918, the game currently has a limited choice of aircraft (eight to be precise) including Spads, Fokkers and Sopwiths. And as some of the cockpits aren't finished, there's a fair way to go before it's comparable with *WarBirds*' roster of more than 50 flyable machines.

FULL OF LEAD ZEPPELIN

The first *Dawn Of Aces* let you fly Zeppelins (huge hydrogen-filled balloons, that could just about catch up an asthmatic tortoise on a good day) and the *DoA* development team has hinted they will make a reappearance

in *DoAIII*. This was certainly a unique feature of the game – and was one of the most enjoyable aspects of any bombing mission.

Now for the million dollar question: is all this effort and development worth the trouble? Currently the game is a freebie bolted on to *WarBirds III*, and even though it is still only in beta test, you're lucky if you can find more than two players online at any one time. Not the best sign. It's like being in a brand new bar – all refurbished with a vast array of drinks – and being the only person there. *DoAIII* is going to have to really go some to get the serious number of players it deserves. [W]

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Making impressive pyrotechnics is one of the more advanced skills in the game.

A TALE IN THE DESERT



Download and first 24 hours of gameplay are free, then \$14 per month | Pub: eGenesis
Dev: eGenesis | ETA: Out Now | www.atitd.com

REQUIRES P400, 192MB RAM and a 16MB graphics card DESIRES PIII 700, 256Mb RAM and a 32MB 3D card

The sun's in her hair and the sand's in her toes.
Rhianna Pratchett learns to walk like an Egyptian

ONLINE ONLY



IF YOU suddenly dropped off the face of the earth, what would be your legacy? A pile of dirty clothes? Some kids, maybe? A pencil holder in the shape of a crocodile that you made when you were five and your mum never had the heart to throw out? That's the thing about being a 21st century consumer – we don't really contribute a whole lot to the world, instead concentrating on destroying it bit by bit.

The beauty about a game like *A Tale In The Desert* is that it's all about creation – the creation of a civilisation in fact – using little more than what you see in the world around you.

LONG, LONG AGO

The premise is simple: you live in the world of ancient Egypt, learning the ways of the land, co-operating with your fellow inhabitants in order to achieve financial, spiritual and bodily advancement. You fish, you farm, you spin flax, you make

bricks, you build pyramids, you go on pilgrimages, you raise sheep and chickens and you play games of luck with other players. In fact, you do everything you'd expect to do in an emerging civilisation, apart from fight. It's a bit like an interactive episode of *The Good Life* but on an epic scale. It's one that works incredibly well and is every bit as addictive as twatting things with a big sword, as we've become used to doing in just about every other MMOG out there.

From the outset, Egypt is quite daunting, especially its size, and it's estimated that it'd take at least 12 hours to cross it on foot, although you do get to set waypoints later. Once you get into the game, however, it's fairly easy to find a mentor (another experienced player) who'll teach you the basics and help you understand how the game works. They aid you in establishing a base, make you feel less of a single grain in an entire sandpit, and help you make the most of your free 24

hours of pre-subscription gameplay time. There are also regular chat channels to allow constant contact with other players and guilds, as well as to view in-game announcements.

What drives *ATITD* is the dependence on other players. Joining and helping to build a community is a must, and allows you access to guild-owned buildings and materials. Players also vote for their own laws and can banish those who break them. Consequently, *ATITD* has a very helpful and

INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST: NEW DAWN

Reviewed issue 125, Score 87%
The ultimate bearded MMOG. Frequented by thousands and great for those looking for something to kill time with for the rest of their lives.

NEOCRON

Reviewed issue 124, Score 85%
The complete opposite to *ATITD* as it's set in the distant future in a *Blade Runner* meets *The Matrix* style world. Still fairly new, but already going strong.



Watching the sun come up. Heavy.



Go to a university to expand your mind.



A mushroom sculpture, and why not?



A visit from the Pharaoh is a rare event.



The community that digs together, stays together.

friendly atmosphere. The community aspect, plus the focus on creativity rather than destruction is maybe the reason the game has gained many female participants, as well as explaining the fact that the average player is in their mid-20s.

"It's like an interactive episode of *The Good Life*"

Much of the game's theme revolves around the ancient Seven Disciplines of Man: Leadership, Architecture, Thought, the Human Body, Worship, Conflict and Art. It was widely believed throughout ancient Egypt that if man could achieve perfection in all seven disciplines, then he would achieve immortality.

Each of the disciplines in-game has associated universities where you can obtain new skills and equipment. There are also

discipline schools where you can learn and master a variety of abilities after passing a specified test – usually requiring different objects to be brought to the school. For example, to be initiated into the discipline of Leadership you have to get 20 people to sign a petition saying

DISCIPLINARIAN

That's only at the basic level. Once you start advancing through the disciplines the tasks get harder and you have to band together with your guild-mates to achieve them. Building your own pyramid, for instance, sees you prospecting for limestone using

special glass rods, and then assembling a team of people (there are no slaves of course – this is a family game) to help you get the damn thing put up.

VIRTUAL PARADISE

The gameplay mechanics of *ATTD* are incredibly well thought-out. Constant attention from the developers means the game is continually evolving, making for a very dynamic world. Where it does fall down somewhat is in the graphics. Currently, it's only fully optimised for GeForce cards, although this is being addressed by eGenesis. The game would also benefit from more animation in the various buildings, especially farms. A few, like the beetle terrarium and the chicken coop, have constant animation, but others remain as lifeless as a taxidermist's window display.

Sound is also something that hasn't been used too well. There are general sounds for the day



After work drinking sessions can be fun.

SHIPS OF THE DESERT

HOW TO GET THE HUMP IN ANCIENT EGYPT

The most useful and revered animal in all of Egypt is the camel. However, getting hold of one is something of a lottery. As midnight strikes (Egyptian time) a camel will appear at whichever pen in a particular area has the most straw. This leads to players amassing vast quantities of the stuff and competing with each other for camel privileges. Once you've got one in your pen, you just need to provide it with straw and honey to get meat, leather, milk and dung. Unfortunately, you can't ride them, which would be a fantastic addition to the game. eGenesis please take note!



Give female camels honey and they'll produce milk.

to night cycle, but you can't help wishing that the furnaces crackled when you fired them, your fishing line plopped as it went into the water and the chickens clucked contentedly when you checked on them at night.

A Tale In The Desert is a unique online experience and the non-combat gameplay won't be for everyone. But I for one have subscribed already, and you won't get more of a recommendation from a games journalist than actually paying for a game. There's something very exhilarating about running around in a world that humans haven't managed to bugger-up

yet. Maybe they will, in time, but for now it's a utopian, hippy paradise. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge and detailed world
- ✓ Lots of community spirit
- ✓ Constant developer input
- ✓ Non-combative
- ✓ Visuals need polishing
- ✗ Sound needs to be improved

85

Refreshingly different and enjoyable

BATTLEFIELD: PIRATES V.11

SIZE 81MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942
www.planetbattlefield.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

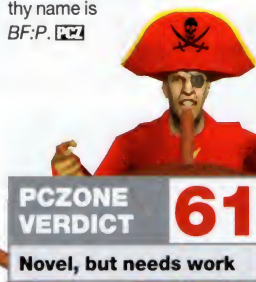
There's hidden treasure here... says Tony 'Blackbeard' Lamb

IT'S TIME to splice your main brace, heave your hearties ho and if you're a cabin boy called Roger then run like hell as *Battlefield: Pirates* takes us back to the high seas of the 1800s for a swashbuckling romp with action and laughs aplenty. Or does it? It's fun, yes – rarely have such giggles of hilarity run around the testing LAN – but with a whole lot of weaknesses this mod has a long way to go yet. There are missing textures, boats that sail happily on land as well as sea, clipping issues aplenty and worst of all, no bots.

But it's not all bad news by any means. *Battlefield: Pirates* is full of good ideas with the Scurvy Cove map (admittedly

one of only two) boasting a highly detailed and impressively armed galleon for each team. Setting to sea for an all-cannons-blazing slugfest is a blast. There are also castles with battlements crammed with firepower, villages to plunder and enough complete madness to keep all but the most jaded player happy for a while. So far, skins are limited to one per team, but the choice of weapons is true to the period and you can attack your enemies with a cutlass, pistol or flintlock rifle (or potato-masher grenade, strangely enough). The rifles in particular are uncannily accurate – which won't last I'm sure – so watch out for sniping.

Battlefield: Pirates won't appeal to lovers of high-tech weaponry, and even my liking for novelty was tested, but there's real potential here. No bots means LAN multiplayer only, so get a gang together and go pillaging. Check out the installer instructions though, confusion thy name is BF:P. [P]



Hard a-port and prepare to battle. Yeehaaaaaah!



Limited maps but a barrel of fun (sorry).



JUNGLE WARFARE - GUERRILLA OPERATIONS

SIZE 350MB REQUIRES Full version of UT2003
www.junglewarfare.jolt.co.uk

TOTAL CONVERSION

Tony Lamb paints his face, whips out a machete and gets into the thick of the action

350MB IT might be, but *Jungle Warfare - Guerrilla Operations* is worth every ounce. This is a huge mod, crammed to the gills with new maps, skins, weapons and sounds. Based around the not-entirely-new Guerrillas vs Good Guys theme, this semi-realistic team- and class-based outing is reminiscent of *Tactical Ops*, *Front Line Force* and of course *Counter-Strike*, but it definitely has its own persona and makes for a very enjoyable game.

Until recently it was simply called 'Jungle Warfare', the addition of the 'Guerrilla Operations' tag referring to an expansion from the already successful and very convincing jungle theatres, to more varied mapping opportunities. That said, just replacing the familiar UT2003 surroundings with the hot, damp and sweaty



That'll definitely leave a mark.

environments of the jungle and with true-to-life firepower makes for a very different experience, so we look forward to what other treats this mod will offer. At this stage, most maps still follow the jungle theme, and

the combination of uneven terrain and thick vegetation makes fighting a difficult and dangerous business. Firefights are sudden and bloody (a facet heightened by JWGO's heavy use of gore) and it becomes



It's a step up from paintball.

increasingly difficult to separate friend and foe.

As well as good maps, the mod offers neat weapon and player skins, addictive gameplay, straight team deathmatch and "sabotage" (attack the enemies' weapon and fuel supplies before your own are compromised) modes – it's damned good fun. More gameplay styles are also

promised in future versions. All in all *Jungle Warfare* is an enjoyable mod that even at this early stage promises to be a real winner. [P]

"Firefights are sudden and bloody, a facet heightened by JWGO's heavy use of gore"

PCZONE VERDICT **75**
 Big, bad and beautiful – the way mods should be



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Your chance to win big, big, BIG prizes as the tournament of tournaments starts in earnest. Come one, come all...

THE TOURNAMENT has begun! The ladders are now open and we need you to start climbing them! Yes, amid much hype, fanfare, ticker-tape parading and huzzahs from the general populace, the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge is underway. Already clans and deathmatchers from across the country have started to sign up for the competition, challenges have been issued and matches have been won and lost. But you know what? We're still missing something. You!

Yes, we still need more to sign up and be in the running to win one of our many prizes, as well as to have the chance of being crowned PC ZONE Readers' Champion, along with all the prestige the title confers. All you need to do is get four of your friends together, visit www.pczone.jolt.co.uk, and sign your team up for either the *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* or *Day Of Defeat* ladders. Or, if you want to go solo, add your name to the *Unreal Tournament 2003* list.

If these games don't grab you, then don't forget future rounds will include such gems as *Soldier Of Fortune II*, *Quake III*, *Medal Of Honor* and the perennial online favourite *Counter-Strike*.

Remember, the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge will be crowning both the greatest solo player and the finest team reading these words. Over a series of four three-month rounds we'll separate the wheat from the chaff out there, ending up with eight clans and four soloists going head-to-head in our Grand LAN Final. Prizes will be awarded to each round winner, with the eventual victors taking home the top awards. Thanks to Gainward, we'll be providing the winning team with no less than five top-of-the-range video cards, while the winning single player will walk off with the very latest hi-spec gaming PC.

The tournament rules are simple. Whichever team or player is sitting at the top of their game's ladder at precisely noon on Monday October 20, 2003 wins round one, secures a slot in the grand final and wins both a

year's free subscription to PC ZONE and the game of their choice!

Registration is as easy as pointing your web browsers at www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and joining the ladder of your choice. Teams are restricted to five players per side and the tournament is open to UK residents only. The full list of rules (including game-specific conditions) can be found at the PC ZONE/Jolt website listed above.

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FIX... EVE ONLINE

▲ EACH MONTH WE ASK OUR READERS TO OFFER THEIR ADVICE TO THE FACELESS MULTINATIONALS CREATING OUR VIRTUAL GAMESCAPES. THIS MONTH... HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE EVE ONLINE?

FROM WalkerT3

Put Cylons in it. And have them go to a space disco filled with Dagitts.

FROM Parrish

Include a free joint in every box to make the trance-like atmosphere of the game absolutely complete.

FROM WhppAss

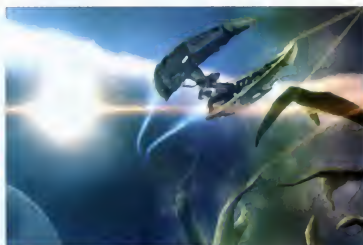
They should make it so that you can land on the planets and get involved in massive huge-scale first-person battles like those in *Planetside*. Combine the two and you've got the perfect game.

FROM CplMalone

Have a sexy female voice read chapters from *Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix* while you spend hours mining.

FROM Metal Mickey

One word: Thargoids.



Thargoids would be good, apparently.

NEXT MONTH How would you fix... *Planetside*?

■ Email your answers and contact details to letters@pczone.co.uk, with a subject line of 'Fix... Planetside' or send them to Fix... Planetside, PC Zone, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. A PC ZONE goodie-bag for any we print!

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL SNIFFS OUT TOMORROW'S LAN PARTIES

It seems that LAN party organisers have let the unfamiliar summer sun go to their heads, as not many of them are keeping their websites up to date. Still, a few are on the ball, so it's kudos and customers for them.

■ www.blasthards.co.uk are holding their next event from 10am on September 5 until 5pm on September 7. It costs £14 and there are still a few spaces left if you are over-13 and can get to the Conservative Club in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. They even provide free sticks to hold your eyes open.

■ A quick one-day event, should you want to catch some last minute sun instead, is at Winsford Civic Hall, Cheshire on September 6 between 10am and 6pm. Only 20 spaces, and they book pretty quickly, so you'll need to send your £15 real soon to the nice people at www.lanpartyzone.co.uk.

■ If you are too slow for the Winsford LAN, but can get to Norwich on the same day, there's a LAN on at Thorpe End with space for 30 players. The cost is the same (£15) but it goes on slightly longer, from 10am until 11pm. More information can be gained from www.lanwars.org.

■ Just time to mention www.badlanrising.com, who have increased their numbers to 150. You need to book before September 1 for reduced entry of £26.50, but the LAN isn't until October 17-19 in Middlesbrough. More on that next month.

■ Last LAN this month is my own www.ggfan.co.uk, which I'll be holding in September in Mile End, London. There are limited places in order to play more games. Visit the forums for all the details.



GUILDHALL



▲ FEELING LOST AND ALONE?

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members, and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

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WEBSITE gamesworlduk.elixant.com

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CONTACT [-BHF-]-Paul

WEBSITE www.brummies.cjb.net

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*, *Digital Paintball* (*Half-Life* mod)

DETAILS We are an up and coming clan that currently has 15 members and are recruiting more. We are in the Enemy Down league and would like to start playing more friendly matches. If you are at all interested email us at brumfun@blueyonder.co.uk. Check out the website for more details.

CLAN =AKA=Club

CONTACT =AKA=CPL= Lpoolboy

WEBSITE www.aka-club.net

MAIN GAMES *SWAT 3*, *Ghost Recon*, *Vietcong*, *Planetside*

DETAILS We used to do everything in *SWAT 3*, and as a result are excellent co-op players. We've just recently started our *Planetside* division and are looking for new members. Check out the website for all the details about how to either join us or challenge us to a match.

CLAN =British Tactical Forces=

CONTACT =BTF=WO2-Airjammer

WEBSITE www.btf-clan.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Battlefield 1942*

DETAILS We've just split into two divisions, one sticking with *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the other forming a new *BF1942* division. We need players for both divisions, so to join either check the site, email enlist@btf-clan.co.uk or try the #btf IRC channel on Quakenet (<irc://irc.quakenet.org/btf>).

CLAN Clan [707]

CONTACT contact@clan707.tk

WEBSITE clan707.tk

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*

DETAILS We are a UK based *Counter-Strike* clan who have the mantra "fun but focussed play". We enjoy playing regularly together but have a focus of where we want to go: ie to climb *Counter-Strike* tournament ladders such as *Enemy Down*. Visit our recruitment page if you share a similar vision.

CLAN The Art Of Warfare

CONTACT Paul 'Psirus' Dunn

WEBSITE www.theartofwarfare.org

MAIN GAMES *Planetside*

DETAILS The game we are recruiting members for is *Planetside*. We need to build up our European squad. We do play other games, although *Planetside* is the main one. The website has more details, and all anyone has to do to join is fill out the application form there.

To feature in Guildhall, simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD.

Getting started in... PLANETSIDE

Life's tough in the army of the future. **Richie Shoemaker** is on duty with a handful of tips to put you at ease, soldier



FIRST THINGS FIRST

1 To get anywhere in this game you need to gain Battle Ranks by clocking up Battle Experience Points, which you get by killing the enemy and helping out in the capture of buildings. You also get BEPs by trying out vehicles and weapons or visiting continents for the first time – which is why you see all the clued-up recruits heading straight to the Virtual Training Centre. If you want to gain a couple more Battle Rankings quickly and easily, find a Continent that your faction has nearly conquered and start supplying your facilities with energy using the ANT (Advance Nanite Transporter).



IT PAYS TO SPECIALISE

4 While soloers need in some respects to be a jack-of-all-trades, team players should invest in skills that mark them out as specialists. Medium Assault is one certification that all players should invest in and if you plan on being an engineer, medic, sniper or any other kind of foot soldier, the skill to be able to wear a reinforced exosuit should also be high on your wish-list. Bear in mind that unless you're already a regular in an organised squad, leaders will always need medics, engineers and galaxy pilots – choose these skills and you will rarely be left behind.



WHICH RACE IS FOR YOU?

2 Since you can only play on one side per server, and since there is only one European server, choosing your faction is not to be taken lightly. As a rule the Terran Republic have the strength, with larger tanks and MAX armour able to double-up on firepower, while the New Conglomerate have the stamina, with well-rounded unique vehicles and MAX armour that can soak up hits. In a head-on fight the Vanu Sovereignty will usually come off the worst, but their speed and laser weapons can make a huge difference to a battle. Or you could base your decision on the colour of the uniforms.

LONESOME GUNNER

3 If you're playing solo, it pays to invest in a vehicle driving skill. Nothing is more frustrating than having to trudge across Auraxis on foot. The Wraith, apart from being the fastest land vehicle in the game, is also able to cloak if the rider is wearing Infiltration Armour – which most hackers do. If you have the 'repair damage' skill you are well and truly self-sufficient. If you're out of vehicle ammo, don't bother running around re-arming it, it's far easier and quicker to use the 'deconstruct' option in your vehicle window and just summon a new one at the required terminal.



THE PERFECT SQUAD

5 In order to capture and hold a facility for the required time, certain skills and units are essential – at least two MAX units that can doggedly defend a crucial position, a medic and engineer to keep everyone patched up and a hacker to be able to quickly rip into the base systems in the first place. Of course it is essential to have the right transportation too, either on land or in the air, especially if you have with you an all-important AMS (Advance Mobile Station) – without which an attack can quickly falter. Most important of all, however, are surprise and leadership. And luck, of course.





COMMAND AND CONQUER

6 If you dream of leading a squad into battle, the best piece of advice we can give you is to act like a leader. Before advertising for talent on the chat channels, check out the map and see which bases need attention. Think about the make-up you need for your squad and come up with a battle plan that will ensure you get the experience points you need to progress. Most importantly of all, give orders. There is nothing so infuriating in this game as a leader who doesn't communicate, or worse still, keeps asking what others think the group should be doing next.

ATTACK IS THE BEST FORM OF DEFENCE

8 There are two reasons why sitting around a base waiting for an enemy attack is a bad thing to do: one, you won't get many experience points, and two, it's excruciatingly dull. If you're a defensive player, take a role that will allow you to support an advance, then when your side has reached its objective and begun hacking the base's control console, switch to defending position. If you do decide to be a medic or an engineer, your squad mates will love you for saving them again and again.



FIRE FIGHT

9 It's true of most first-person shooters and it's true of *Planetside*, but still most people forget the fact that if you keep your fire button down, you will not only run out of ammo but you will most probably miss your target as well. Use short, controlled bursts to down the enemy – it's economical and much more effective. If you are plagued by lag, lead your targets by aiming for where the enemy is heading rather than where they actually are. And if you can carry two rifles at once and run out of ammo, it's quicker to switch weapons rather than reload.



WASH & GO

7 When your tower is under attack, the last thing you want to be doing is dragging ammo packs into your inventory. Always create a few different equipment configurations for different situations and save them in your Favourites tab at the Equipment Terminal. That way you can just grab one and go. Better still, have one ready-ordered with health packs for when you need some serious patching up and there is no medic around. That way you can equip yourself, use up the packs, then select your favourite weapons set-up and waltz back into battle all pepped up.



MORE PLEASE

10 Due to the nature of online games, changes are always going to be made and a strategy that worked yesterday may not work tomorrow. That is why I always keep an eye on Planetside Universe (www.planetside-universe.com), probably the hottest *Planetside* site on the Internet. For more hints and tips, the best places to look are usually dedicated sites set up by Outfit leaders, www.outlanders-outfit.org being just one of many. Knowing your tactics, knowing your terrain and knowing your enemy = staying alive. Now get out there and hit them hard!

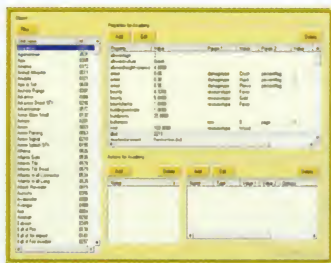
COMMUNITY CHEST

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY



Rhianna Pratchett enters an online world where mortals dare to play with the gods

Thank God for history. Not only does it explain how we all came to exist, but thanks to Microsoft's plunderings, it's spawned one of the most successful RTS franchises ever: the *Age Of* series. *Age Of Mythology* (the third and fully 3D incarnation) dwells on those more romanticised parts of history found in Egyptian, Greek and Norse mythology. The game's easy-to-use editor has given AoM a flourishing online community, with devoted fans creating campaigns, single and multiplayer missions and a host of other updates. Here are the best.



ON THE CD OBJECT EDITOR (UTILITY)

www.aomfiles.com

One of the main criticisms levelled at AoM's editor is that it doesn't include a feature that allows you to tweak the stats of your units and buildings. Criticise no more as that is exactly what this handy little utility does for the game, bar for online play. Thankfully, it also comes with its own nine-page guide.



ON THE CD WORLD MAP VX (MULTIPLAYER SCENARIO)

aom.heavengames.com

This is one of the most impressive multi-player maps around for AoM. Taking place on a huge 1300x1300 tile board, the author, CheeZy Monkey, has created a geographically accurate map of the world, for up to eight players. Lots of hidden surprises, well-balanced terrain and eye-candy make it a real gem.



ON THE CD WORLD LIGHTING EFFECTS PACK (UTILITY)

aom.heavengames.com

This is another great utility addition from CheeZy Monkey, this time he's created a bunch of different lighting environments for use in the game. These new effects are: blackness, cloudy, full moon, new moon, neon, sunrise and light. Download them for added atmosphere.



ON THE CD THE GOLDEN GIFT (OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN)

www.microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology/greek_downloads.asp

There's no better example of how to create a great scenario than this official campaign from Ensemble Studios – hopefully the start of many more releases. *Golden Gift* is a four part campaign that follows the story of two of the characters from the original game – the dwarf brothers Brokk and Eitri.



ON THE CD NEW EDITOR 7 (UTILITY)

aom.heavengames.com

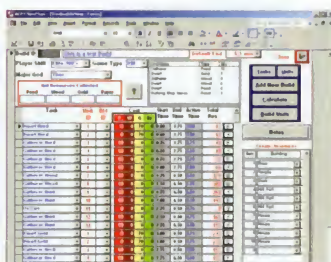
This is the latest version of the fan created New Editor which adds more than 110 new features to the existing *Age Of Mythology* editor. If you really want to get the most out of your maps then install this tool so you can add features such as a screen-shot button and an enhanced flattening/smoothing tool.



ON THE CD BANDITS (SINGLE-PLAYER SCENARIO)

aom.heavengames.com

In this very well-crafted scenario, created by xLPx, you control a small Norse nomad clan. Your little group of Nordic ragamuffins manages to get captured early on, and you'll have to traverse your way through some deadly caves and join forces with a band of trolls to escape alive.



ON THE CD AOM SIMULATION TOOL (UTILITY)

aom.heavengames.com

Think of this unusual tool as a kind of battlefield assistant. It helps you refine your gaming strategies by helping determine how you should assign your villagers and build orders to achieve certain goals. Basically it does the thinking for you. Great stuff!



ON THE CD THE 13TH WARRIOR: EATERS OF THE DEAD (SINGLE-PLAYER CAMPAIGN)

www.aomfiles.com

This single-player campaign is based on the film *The 13th Warrior*, which in turn is based on Michael Crichton's novel *The Eaters Of The Dead*. The campaign is split into three parts and demonstrates how AoM's cut-scene editor can be used to bring atmosphere and life to a scenario.

AAAAAAAARGH!!

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST



Continuing the adventures of online virgin
Steve Hill. This month: *PlanetSide*

THIS IS more like it. Out with the goblins, in with the killing machines. Tanks, guns, bombs... a three way struggle for galactic supremacy. Like the box says, 'FOR LAND. FOR POWER. FOREVER.' Let's not get carried away. I'll give it half an hour – it surely has to be more entertaining than trudging round a cave hitting rats with a stick. You'd think so, wouldn't you? Not if you've ever sat through *PlanetSide*'s training missions, one of the most tedious, patronising gaming experiences to date. The only good thing to come out of it is the news that enemies should be dispatched with "short, controlled bursts," thus echoing the mantra of the PC ZONE office.

Enough already, it's time for action. There's a war going on, and I need to choose sides. Following some lengthy soul-searching over the socio-political motives of the Vanu Sovereignty and the New Conglomerate, I eventually opt to fight for the Terran Republic on the basis that they're from Earth: stick to what you know. Selecting the Instant Action option, it proves to be anything but, as I am transferred to what appears to be a mid-sized



industrial estate on the outskirts of a Northern town. So much for the revolution – there isn't even a Halfords. Equipment slightly more useful than a derailleur gear is available though, and this appears to be some kind of a home base (as opposed to a Homebase) where arms can be traded and yet more training undertaken. There are at least people to talk to, although it rarely gets beyond a cursory "Hail" and a limp salute.

RELEASE THE OTTERS
Rapidly losing patience, I spot a symbol for a shuttle, which apparently leads directly to the war zone ("calling at Didcot Parkway, Birmingham New Street and Armageddon, where this service will terminate"). Progress at last, although a quick glance at a sign reveals

that the next shuttle is due in five and a half minutes. Christ on a bike, it's a sodding public transport simulator, and I'm tempted to whip out the mobile for a quick game of *Snake II*. However, there are more pressing matters, and I genuinely go for a shit while waiting, returning with just under a minute on the clock. How's that for an immersive experience?

Finally on the shuttle, it rockets directly upwards in a reasonably scary manner, and tears across the sky at a rate of knots. After the preceding drudgery, it's actually mildly exciting and demands my full attention. As does being dropped from the shuttle into the middle of a full-scale war in little more than a Kinder Egg with heat shielding. People are actually trying to kill me, and I duck for cover while returning fire with my pitiful pea-shooter. It seems we are attempting to storm some kind of building, although I am hopelessly pinned down by air attacks. That is until a big marine, a giant with a

pair of friendly eyes, appears at my shoulder and says: "Wait."

Not bloody likely. Using his bulk for cover, I make an audacious bid to reach an unmanned tank. Dodging the bullets, I attempt to leap into the driving seat but a message appears telling me that I don't have the correct certification. Limbs are flying through the air, and I'm being told I need a driving licence. Bureaucracy gone mad. Cursing like a brickie, I try the gunner's seat instead and grapple with the armoury. "Can anyone drive?," I frantically appeal to nobody in particular. At that precise moment the tank lurches forward, swinging round to face the enemy building. Another gunner joins us, and we are underway, picking aircraft out of the sky with aplomb.

WANNA BE IN MY GANG

This is what it's all about; war makes you feel good, makes you feel like a man. Heading towards the target, ground troops scatter in our wake. All with the exception of one foolhardy soul, bizarrely bearing the name Gary Glitter (so that's where he's got to). With

understandably renewed vigour, the driver makes a beeline for him, crushing the faux-paedophile beneath the tracks of our mighty tank. Take that.

With the Glam Rock kiddie-fiddler dispatched, it's with a smug glow that we proceed through the shrubbery. However, the tank is taking damage, and I am warned to make a rapid exit before it blows. Heeding the advice, I make a Hollywood-style dash, leaping for cover as it explodes. Scanning the terrain, amazingly I spot Glitter again, who has respawned and is lurking on a hillside. Taking careful aim, I pin the nonce in my sights, and gently squeeze the trigger. At which point, the convicted sex fiend discovers the power of flight and takes off, simultaneously spraying me with his hot discharge (I doubt I'm the first). Before I can respond, I am dead, slain by Glitter in a revenge attack. And they call it justice.

"With the Glam Rock kiddie-fiddler dispatched we proceed with a smug glow"

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HARDWARE

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GORDON'S ALIVE!



■ DOOM AND GLOOM Phil Wand

▲ "What better way to celebrate QuakeCon than to unveil to our fans a preview of *DOOM 3* multiplayer," says Todd Hollenshead, id Software's CEO. "Everyone knows that *DOOM 3* is the most terrifying and scary single-player experience ever created." Actually, Todd, they don't. All most of us have to go on are some rather dated *House Of The Dead* screenshots and a few slickly edited trailers – and you can make a Jim Carrey film look good if you chop it into small enough pieces.

Let's face it, a multiplayer demo doesn't mean squat. All it's going to be is a small arena of love-struck *Quake* fans fragging each other and getting excited over the physics. It's not going to feature characters, atmosphere, creativity, plot, artificial intelligence – or indeed anything to make your heart sing and your imagination hump the nearest chair. And now comes news that the sci-fi shooter's release date has marched into 2004. id has said its code "will be ready when it's ready", which sounds all very commendable and power-to-the-programmers, until you remember that that they too were at E3. Like everyone else who visited the show they'll have clapped eyes on *Half-Life 2*'s plasma screen with its army of spellbound faces, and their ring-pieces will have fired like paparazzi cameras. *Half-Life 2* now looks like it might hit first, and we still think it's going to change the face of gaming forever.

Will developers like id take note and go back to the drawing board? And what does this huge release mean for hardware buyers? Well, if you're in the market for a mega video card, there's really no point in splashing out yet. There's nowt between here and *Half-Life* that'll make it seem worth the monster price tag, and there's a big chance new, beefier models will appear before you get to use it properly. So hold onto your cash.

SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

Flat screens can now more than imitate CRT monitors – time to buy?



WHERE CRT MONITOR sales slid by a quarter last year, LCD panels surged by almost a third. And while much of the demand is fuelled by businesses making the switch – flat screens being easier on power, neater on desk space and gentler on the eyes – the technology has recently reached a point where it's good enough and cheap enough for gamers. There was a time when even the very best LCD monitor would smudge what you saw when you ran around in your favourite shooter, a phenomenon known as 'afterglow'. Here, the edges of moving elements aren't updated quickly enough, and a definite trail is left in their wake – slow reactions from liquid crystals making action gaming a rather blurry affair.

Now though, many flat panels are offering response times of 20ms and below, the response being the number of milliseconds it takes for a pixel to wink black, white, and then black again. And 20ms is round about the time that fast-paced first-person games like *Unreal Tournament* become feasible; 16ms is short enough to make cathode ray die-hards ditch phosphor for good.

HOW IT WORKS

While there are a number of different LCD technologies available, the principal behind them remains the same. A bright, neon lamp forms the back of the panel, with light from it reflected uniformly across the entire display area. Liquid crystals are affected by electricity, and with tiny voltage fluctuations can be made to 'control' the light by angling it through red, green and blue filters before forming a colour image on the screen.

The most obvious advantage over CRT is the fact that LCD doesn't flicker. Where a traditional monitor forms a

picture by endlessly redrawing it at a predetermined rate, a flat panel updates only the pixels that require changing. And while LCD screens do still refresh, usually around the 60Hz mark, to maintain a gentle wash of voltage over each crystal, there isn't the slightest hint of a quiver. Indeed, if you're prone to eye-strain or headaches, outting your old monitor in favour of a new panel will add hours to your computing stamina. The one downside of an LCD is that it's native resolution – the actual number of pixels within the product – is the upper limit for everything you see.

MAKING THE CHOICE

For the past two weeks I've been testing Hitachi's £330 CML174SXW. And you know what? It's converted me to the 'flat cause', jumping straight into the Editor's Choice slot in our Buyer's Guide. Previous experience of a Samsung SyncMaster meant I would recoil from LCDs the same way a *Quake III* player might leap back from a copy of *The Sims*. The 25ms SyncMaster screen was big, beautiful, and attached to a top-secret pre-release NVIDIA card, but plain awful at the same time – it successfully managed to make *Battlefield 1942* look like peed-on watercolours.

The 17in CML174SXW is however in a different league. With a response time of 16ms, afterglow is practically gone, the screen is astonishingly bright, and the colours pure and vivid. I've also found that the Hitachi will reproduce low resolutions without any huge reduction in quality, meaning if your old GeForce is quivering at the thought of having to run games at its native 1280x1024, it needn't worry. Plus, anyone who carries their screen to and from LAN parties will be delighted at how light flat panel displays are – at just 5Kg the CML174SXW can be carried with one hand – and if you've ever felt that the screen size of CRT monitors is a swiz, with 19in displays in reality offering little more than 17in viewable, LCDs are exactly what they say on the box.

Hitachi's CML174SXW is a super fast, super bright 17in LCD that's ideal for gamers





SOUNDCARDS
Six of the best songbirds...



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Got a problem you can't fix?



WATCHDOG
Rogue traders beware



BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit, the lowest prices

DRIVER WATCH

Make a date with your next driver

ANOTHER NOTCH up for the CATALYST drivers and related ATI control panels, together with a redesigned corporate website that makes getting to the right download a little easier – the selection process is now a carbon copy of NVIDIA's. Other than the Radeon-related news, there's no movement in any of the key driver areas. Given the problems users are reporting with the 44.03 Detonator FX drivers, and the amount of people recommending using earlier versions, we find that hard to understand. It's been three months – is everyone on holiday at NVIDIA?

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update	5.0	14-Mar-03	1.38MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	nForce	2.03	30-Jan-03	29.5MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.6a	02-Jun-03	5.3MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	4.48	24-Jun-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	CATALYST	6.14.10.6368	15-Jul-03	6.52MB	www.ati.com
	Control Panels	6.14.10.5021	15-Jul-03	5.20MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	44.03	14-May-03	18.8MB	www.nvidia.com
Matrox	Parhelia	1.04.01.003	05-May-03	8.68MB	www.matrox.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 WDM Drivers	DriverPack 3	09-May-03	6.88MB	uk.europe.creative.com
	Audigy EAX ADVANCED HD Perf	Beta	07-May-03	13.96MB	uk.europe.creative.com
	SB Live!	AC3 fix	03-Jun-03	2.12MB	uk.europe.creative.com

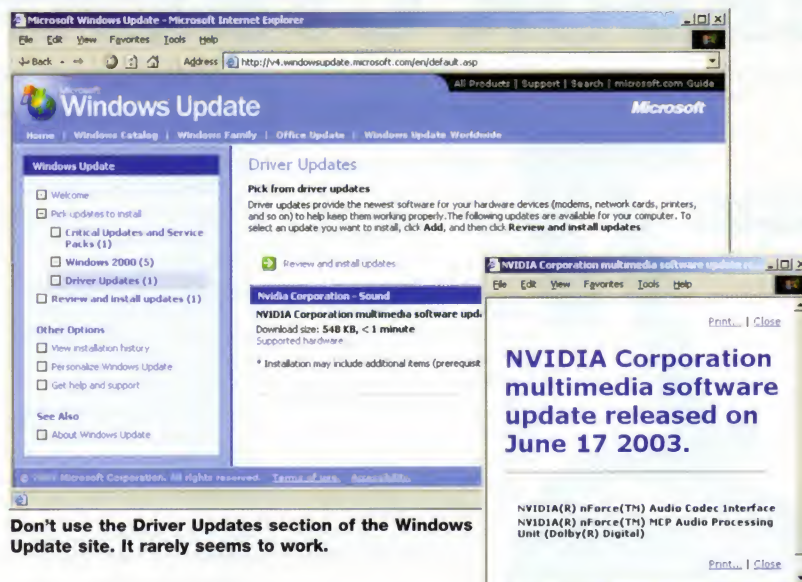
DRIVER WATCH OUT

Windows Update problems wreak havoc at Wendy Towers

BACK IN march of this year, a driver update was flagged on the Windows Update site. It was described as 'Intel network software' and although my PC was working as it should, I added it to my list of downloads, figuring that, unlike say a video card driver, if everything went horribly wrong at least I could still see what I was doing to fix it.

Oh dear. Some time later, having wrestled with floppy disks, CD-ROMs and USB pen drives, my PC was back on the network. And if you thought that would be enough to keep me away from such things, I was at it again earlier this week with nForce audio drivers. Without thinking, I selected the update and this time my PC forgot it had a sound card, meaning I had to reinstall the drivers that came with my motherboard.

Only this morning someone dropped me a quick note explaining they'd used the Windows Update site to install security patches together with a new video driver, and now the



Don't use the Driver Updates section of the Windows Update site. It rarely seems to work.

machine froze whenever someone touched the keyboard. She was free to use the mouse, but the moment she hit a key it'd lock.

The lesson here is never, and I mean never, use automated driver patching.

If you're using a later version of Windows, open the Automated Updates control panel and ensure that you are notified before download commences, and check what you're in line for. Only update if you're unhappy with the way your

machine is performing – like they say, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. If you must make changes, ensure you have a copy of your current, working driver set, and get the installer for new drivers from the manufacturer's website.

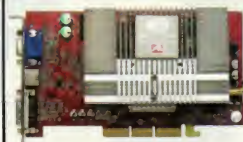
SNIPPETS

GRANDPA'S TOOL SHED

I'd been looking to build myself a fourth PC, and was disturbed by all the silly cases on the market. I wanted something solid and robust, well designed and well priced, but what I found were windowed aluminium boxes with no power supply and colour schemes that wouldn't look out of place in my nephew's toy cupboard. And to be frank, temperature readouts, strobe lights and the 0-60 of my hard drive to three decimal places are pretty useless when the thing lives under my desk and next to my feet. Undeterred, a little research led me to the Antec Plus 1080AMG. It's built like Grandpa's tool shed and for under £100 it comes fitted with a quiet 430W PSU, boasts three separate fans, front-mounted USB and FireWire (an absolute must-have these days), ten drive bays with removable drive rails and cages, plus a neat hinged side panel complete with a lockable catch. It's not exactly good-looking, but in the event of a nuclear war it can provide long-term shelter for a Jack Russell. Full details can be had at www.antec-inc.com



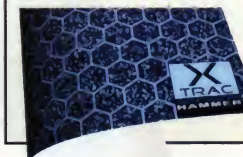
ULTIMATE QUIET



Keep an eye out for Sapphire's Ultimate Edition Radeon. The special version ATI cards feature passive cooling solutions which silently transfer heat from the business end to the flip side of the card where it dissipates into the air stream flowing through your case. Aside from two large radiators that sandwich the chip, boosting its breadth to over 5cm, the electronics remain as before. The cost of silence? About £25 more than noise. www.sapphiretech.com

SLICKHAMMER

The newest mouse pad from gaming freaks XTracPads is the XTrac HAMMER, designed especially for optical rodents. It measures a whopping 11x17 inches, features super-sticky Sure Grip II rubber backing, and is no thicker than a business card. If you're serious about shooting, you'll know the difference a decent mat can make. Buy online at www.everglide.co.uk.



ELUMINX KEYBOARD

■ £89.95 | Manufacturer: Eluminx | Phone: 0208 925 8203 (Seventh Heaven) | www.seventhheavenuk.com

Scared of the dark? Get yourself a nightlight you can play games with

KEYBOARD

COOL, we thought to ourselves. A keyboard that glows in the dark. Cool beans. And we were pretty much right with our off the cuff verdict. The

Eluminx Keyboard bathes your keys with a cool blue wash that enables you to see what you're doing in the dark – handy for late-night *Counter-Strike* and impressing your mates.

There are two problems though, the way we see it. For starters, the keyboard only comes in the one size, which is pretty compressed and not ideal for

playing games on. True, you'll get used to the layout pretty quickly, and some of you might actually prefer the cramped style. But it would be nice to at least be offered a choice.

And then there's the price. A glow-in-the-dark keyboard is a luxury and comes with a luxury price tag. You can get a perfectly decent keyboard for a little under £30 from our Buyer's Guide, and unless you're looking to put the finishing touches to your customised PC with its holes, flashing lights and toaster-rack, you can probably do without this.

Still, cool was never about necessity, and if you're still with us then you'll be probably be interested to know that the actual mechanics of the keyboard are sound, and the keys are satisfying to click. At the moment you can get it in any colour you want, as long as it's black (with the blue glow), but we're told there are plans to roll other combinations out in the future. Drop it down to somewhere near £50, get rid of the wire, and we'd be placing an order ourselves.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Solid keyboard
- ✓ Cool blue glow
- ✗ Too expensive
- ✗ Cramped layout

67

At this price, it's one for the overpaid

REEBOK CYBERRIDER

■ £299 | Manufacturer: Reebok | Phone: 0870 420 3236 | www.reebokcyberrider.com

Keep fit and play games at the same time? Bring it on...

KEEP-FITPAD

"GET your fat arse off that chair, switch that bloody computer game off and put those shelves up! And do some

exercise, you fat bastard!" Sound familiar? Want it to stop? Well then, the Reebok CyberRider may just be the very thing you need to get 'er or 'im indoors off your back. And while it won't help you with your flat-packed shelving problem, it'll at least help you lose your tank-arse and beer gut, while playing games at the same time.

An exercise bike in its own right, the CyberRider's tenuous claim to gaming fame is that you can plug it into your PC and use it like a giant, thigh-burning gamepad. Compatible with

pretty much any game, but recommended for racing ones, you regulate the speed you drive at by peddling faster or slower, while steering with the handlebar-mounted buttons.

And that's pretty much all there is to it in terms of playing games. Installation is simple – just plug it into a serial port and calibrate it like you would a gamepad. Then fire up the racer of your choice, and start pedalling like a bastard.

Unfortunately, calibration can be a bit suspect, while the positioning of the handlebar buttons are about as ergonomic as a square mouse. On the plus side, you do get a half-decent workout, the handling's quite easy to master and best of all, you soon forget that you're doing exercise (until you collapse off the bike gasping for breath.)

If you were thinking of shelling out £300 on an exercise

bike anyway, and have a love of racing games, then it's worth considering. But while it's easy to see a future for this sort of device (let's face it, gyms are bloody boring), the CyberRider only hints at its potential and doesn't really grab you as an essential purchase.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Work out and play games at the same time
- ✓ Easy to install
- ✗ Expensive if you just want to use it for games
- ✗ Some suspect calibration
- ✗ Limited gaming appeal
- ✗ Un-ergonomic button positioning

55

A rather primitive glimpse of the future



MSI EXCLUSIVE COOLING GEAR!!!

MSI TWIN FLOW™ COOLING SYSTEM

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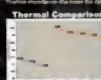
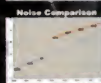
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(All test figures are based on the comparison with NVIDIA original fan-sink)

MSI Twin Flow™ Noise List

Model	Reference Temperature	MSI Twin Flow™ Noise	NVIDIA Reference Noise
FX-5900	40°C	26db	34db
FX-5900	50°C	28db	36db
FX-5900	60°C	30db	38db
FX-5900	70°C	32db	40db
FX-5900	80°C	34db	42db
FX-5900	90°C	36db	44db
FX-5900	100°C	38db	46db



Blaze Your Vision, MSI FX Series



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- New Generation NVIDIA® CineFX™ Engine 2.0
- New NVIDIA® Intellisample™ HCT Technology
- Cutting-edged NVIDIA® UltraShadow Support
- Microsoft® DirectX® 9.0 Support



MSI FX5600 Series

- Powered by NVIDIA® GeForce FX 5600 GPU
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- MSI E3 Power Cube Support
- New Generation NVIDIA® CineFX™ Engine Technology
- New NVIDIA® Intellisample™ Technology
- Microsoft® DirectX® 9.0 Support and OpenGL® 1.4 Optimization



MSI FX5200 Series

- Powered by NVIDIA® GeForce FX 5200 GPU
- 64MB/128MB DDR Support
- MSI T.O.P. TECH II Cooling System Support
- New Generation NVIDIA® CineFX™ Engine Technology
- Microsoft® DirectX® 9.0 Support and OpenGL® 1.4 Optimization

* All functions above are optional for all of MSI products. * MSI is a trademark of Micro-Star Int'l Co., Ltd. * Specifications are subject to change without notice. * All brand names are registered trademarks of their respective owners. * Any configuration other than original product specification is not guaranteed.

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SOUNDCARD ROUND-UP



Five soundcards, one on-board sound chip, seven DVDs, and more music than you can imagine. If you want to annoy your neighbours, *Wandy* has the toys

BEING SERIOUS about gaming doesn't just mean having a fiendish video card and a CPU with more processing power than an *Independence Day* mothership. A lot of gamers skimp on their soundcards, often leaving the job to onboard controllers or leftovers from their previous PC. That's a shame, because modern titles can be twice as involving when your ears experience them in 3D, and music has become an important aspect of living with your computer. Don't forget that FPS shooters are easier to play with positioned sound,

as noises play a pivotal role in telling where the enemy is – your ears tell you almost as much as your eyes.

This month's big test looks at five sound cards and the on-board solution from NVIDIA: TerraTec's Aureon 5.1 Fun and 7.1 Space, Creative's Live! 5.1 Digital and Audigy 2, M-Audio's 7.1 Revolution and NVIDIA's SoundStorm 5.1. Just so you know, 5.1 and 7.1 refer to audio channels – 5.1 means that the sound is recorded with five main channels: left, right, centre, left surround, and right surround, plus subwoofer (referred to as '.1' as it deals with just a fraction of the frequencies arriving at the main speakers). 7.1 sound includes two additional surround speakers and isn't especially practical for your bedroom.



THE LISTENING TEST

TO RATE THE CARDS, WE PUT TOGETHER A PANEL OF EXPERTS. AND WANDY

Presided over by yours truly, our panel retired to a darkened listening room with a hoard of aural delights to sample. The best way of appraising any audio hardware is to plug in, kick back, and let your sensory receptors decide. Which is exactly what we did. Here are the ingredients we used for the test:

GAMES

Unreal Tournament 2003, *Half-Life/Team Fortress Classic*, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Battlefield 1942*, *America's Army*

AUDIO CD TRACKS

Conquest Of Paradise (Vangelis), *Nobody Home* (Pink Floyd), *Clarinet Marmalade* (Ken Colyer), *Reachers Of Civilisation* (York), *Marwood Walks* (Dundas & Wentworth), *Walk This Way* (Aerosmith)

MIDI/MOD FILES

Mission Impossible Theme (MIDI), *Ambient Power* (MOD)

128K MP3 TRACKS

Time Of Your Life (Green Day), *The Wonders of You* (Andy Hunter), *The Orange Theme* (Cygnus X), *Watermark* (Enya), *At The Castle Gate* (Sibelius), *Baker Street* (Foo Fighters), *The End* (Dan Lind)

DVD

Donnie Darko, *The Matrix*, *Fifth Element*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Star Wars Episode II*, *Zoom Tour Live* (ELO), *High Grass Dogs* (Tom Petty)

The test itself comprised both headphones and surround speaker game tests, followed by music and finally key scenes from the chosen movies.

TEST EQUIPMENT

IF YOU AIN'T GOT NO SPEAKERS, YOU AIN'T GOT NO SOUND

MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

■ £270 Manufacturer: Creative Labs
Phone: N/A
europe.creative.com



Although these Creatives are sans digital and Dolby (don't let the THX symbol fool you into thinking otherwise – it's little more than a badge of honour) the clout from them is huge and makes any sound from any game shine a little brighter. Action titles is where this set really excels, reproducing even the most demanding effects with a brash efficiency. Alternatives look equally tasty and are a whole lot cheaper, but since we're here principally to shake the room with explosions, the bombastic Megaworks gets the job.

HA-DX3

■ US\$159.95
Manufacturer: Victor Company of Japan
Phone: 0870 330 5000
www.jvc.co.uk



I'm big on JVC headphones. Everyone talks Sennheiser, but the HA-DX3 cans are more comfortable and produce a more driven sound, with bass crisper than a freshly minted tenner. They're a five-star HiFi Choice winner, the magazine declaring the set to be "difficult to fault... responsive, and beautifully balanced". I was unable to find a retailer in this country, and instead bought a pair from B&H Photo Video store in New York – they were delivered via UPS in two days. Sweet.

AUREON 5.1 FUN

■ £30 | Manufacturer: TerraTec | Phone: 00 49 215 781 790
www.terratec.co.uk

An entry level card from a premium level manufacturer

THE TEUTONIC

equivalent of Creative Labs, TerraTec produces a wide selection of PC kit, from video cards to web cams. Best known for premium quality audio, I expected a lot from the Aureon.

To kick things off, the installation prompted warnings about the drivers not having passed the Windows logo test. I skip such things without blinking, but this kind of thing alarms the non-savvy. Critically, the host machine rebooted whenever a DVD was inserted, and while an update from the TerraTec site cured this problem, it's still unnerving to have your XP desktop replaced by the front door to your BIOS.

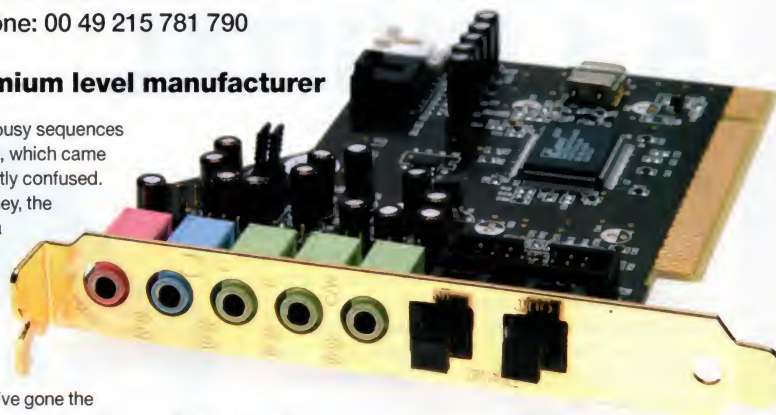
Once up and running, the Aureon delivered a mixed bag of results. Classical tracks were crisp and spatial, and every game we threw at the card exceeded expectations of the hardware's low price. But rock and trance lacked sparkle and suffered poor detailing. Why, I couldn't say. Most obvious to

the ears were busy sequences from *Star Wars*, which came across as slightly confused.

For the money, the Aureon Fun is a good package. Those of you with digital set-ups will hear the best the card has to offer, but if you've gone the optical route then you're not going to be looking at budget solutions. So although the little TerraTec seems to offer a range of features, it does so to the wrong people. The performance in the games we tried was good, but not quite on a par with the Creative kit. Combined with its clumsy rendition of rock and electronic music, it's not an immediate choice for gamers.

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

3x stereo mini jack out, 1x stereo mini jack line in, 1x mono powered microphone input, 1x



digital output, 1x digital input and a joystick/MIDI on separate bracket.

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS

CD in and Aux in.

BUZZWORDS

EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Sensaura, DirectSound, Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

WinDVD, MusicMatch Jukebox, Emagic Logic Fun, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, *Gun Metal*, *Warcraft III* and a TerraTec Headset Master.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Low price, truly superb bundle
- ✓ Range of connections
- ✗ Low fidelity in key areas
- ✗ Suspect drivers

80

Unbeatable value, but some questions remain

AUREON 7.1 SPACE

■ £80 | Manufacturer: TerraTec | Phone: 00 49 215 781790
www.terratec.co.uk

Can TerraTec mix it with the big boys?

TERRATEC'S big 7.1 card is aimed squarely at Audigy and Revolution buyers, and matches its rivals in pretty much every area on paper. So it was down to the sound quality and drivers to help it inch ahead.

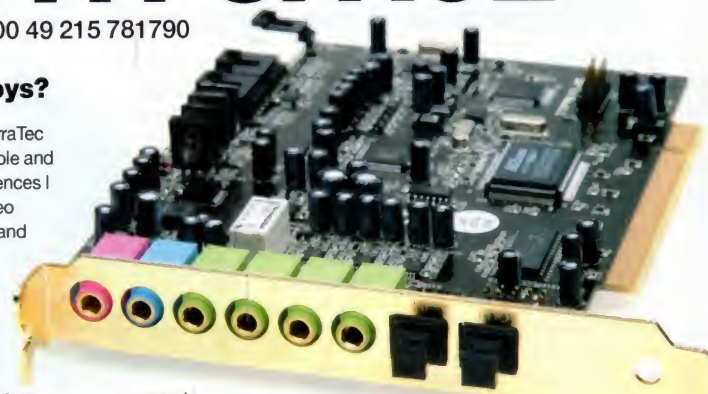
Which is a shame, because that's where it fell flat in our test. While the software installation came and went without a hitch, the card took an immediate dislike to *Battlefield 1942* – although reproduction of effects and sound imaging were near flawless, the machine would reboot between levels and reboot again when you quit the game. It also threw *Unreal Tournament 2003* back to the desktop on two occasions. There were no issues of a similar magnitude with any of the other hardware on test.

This can only be a driver issue. As the Aureon 5.1 Fun

demonstrated, the TerraTec software is questionable and reminds me of experiences I had with early ATI video cards. Fix the drivers and the card is instantly a real contender against the likes of the Audigy. But with crashes, distinctly average stereo performance, and the fact that I couldn't get the card to reproduce music in pseudo 3D – the other kit here offers this functionality (the Revolution doing it best) – the 7.1 Space isn't a front-runner. The Aureon also delivers a monster wallop to the speakers when you power off the PC, something you don't expect and don't want when you're heading to bed at 3am.

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

4x stereo mini jack out, 1x stereo mini jack line in, 1x mono



powered microphone input, 1x digital output and 1x digital input.

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS

2x CD in, Aux in and CD SPDIF.

BUZZWORDS

EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Sensaura, ASIO, DirectSound, Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Optical lead, PowerDVD, MusicMatch Jukebox and WaveLab Lite 2.0.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Intuitive software
- ✓ Quality music reproduction
- ✗ Suspect drivers
- ✗ Expected better from headphones

83

A good card in exceptional company

SOUND BLASTER LIVE! 5.1 DIGITAL

■ £26 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs
Phone: N/A | europe.creative.com

It's cheap, but can it make you cheerful?

EVERYONE'S had a Creative card, because Creative has been there since everyone can remember – the Singapore firm was founded back in 1981, the same year IBM launched the PC. Its most famous brand, Sound Blaster, has over time become synonymous with dependability – you know it'll play nicely with every game you own, and you know it'll do justice to your MP3 collection.

Alas, things didn't start well. The installation crashed, and like the Audigy, the bundled software overwrote existing file associations. The listening tests began with *Conquest Of Paradise* by Vangelis – I've always thought of it as a little too Wagnerian, but the Creative card delivered it with such clarity that criticisms were instantly lost in the music. The

Zoom Tour DVD and Pink Floyd album had me nodding in my headphones, and trance made the assembled panel want to wind up the volume and wave their hands in the air. Games were of a similar standard, although the effects were not quite as elaborate as those from pricier cards.

If you're building a second PC for your home, or you're not preoccupied with having top notch everything, the Live! 5.1 Digital can make your computer sing like a canary for less than the price of a game. It's not perfect – compared to its big brother or to the M-Audio Revolution, it's plainly from the lower ranks – but as an entry sector card it's unfair to make

direct comparisons with hardware costing four times as much. We also mustn't forget that Creative understands games, and if you're not a music nut, the extra dimension of sound is worth twice the admission price.

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

3x stereo mini jack out, 1x stereo mini jack line in, 1x mono powered microphone input, 1x digital output and joystick/MIDI.

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS

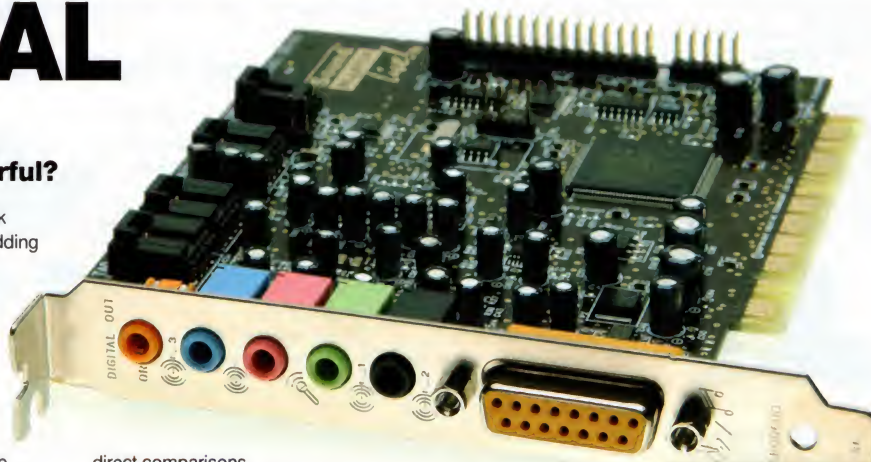
Telephone answering device, CD in, Aux in and CD SPDIF.

BUZZWORDS

EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, DirectSound, A3D and Dolby Digital 5.1.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Creative application suit and eRacer.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Cheap as chips
- ✓ All round good quality
- ✗ Too much software baggage
- ✗ Rude and buggy installer

82

Good news for budget minded gamers

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2

■ £100 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: 00 353 1 8205052 | europe.creative.com

A gaming hardware classic. Is it as good as everyone claims?

YOU'VE got the processor, the video card and the memory, but what about sound? Ah yes, of course, the Audigy 2. Like a Dolce & Gabbana suit, the big SB barks coolness – you may not understand the attraction of it, nor why everyone praises it, but the fact that they do must mean it's good. Right?

Well, yes and no. While the card works admirably, producing the kind of sparkling, effervescent sound that'll add hours to your games, while there's a wide range of connectors available, and although it truly does everything you could ever want from a sound card, it isn't the winner of this test because it doesn't sound as good as the M-Audio Revolution. Yes, DVD reproduction is superb, and yes, the separation and placement of the surround image is perfect. But when it comes to kicking back with your favourite Internet radio station, or drifting away to a movie, it loses out.

The Audigy 2 is a wonderful card and a well deserved multi-award winner. It comes with all the kit a gamer could want, it makes no imposition on your CPU, and it's a real ear-bender in action titles. However, the Creative application suite is

immoderate, providing you with a chaotic spray of utilities whose functionality is made redundant by utilities you already have. And the installer rudely steals file extensions. I'd also question the quality of music reproduction – while the Audigy is famed for open sounds driven by a clenched fist of bass, listening on headphones or through just two speakers produced below

par results. What's more, trance tracks were strangely murky. Compared side by side with the Revolution, the difference is marked.

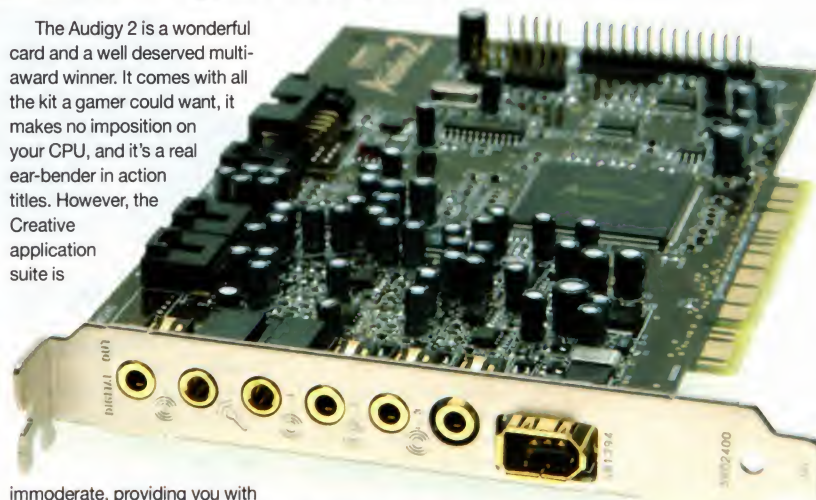
EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

3x stereo mini jack out, 1x stereo mini jack line in, 1x mono powered microphone input, 1x

digital output, 1x SB1394 FireWire and a joystick/MIDI on a separate bracket.

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS

Telephone answering device, CD in, Aux in, SB1394 and CD SPDIF.



BUZZWORDS

EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, EAX 3.0, Sensaura, DirectSound, A3D, Dolby Digital 5.1, Dolby Digital EX (6.1) and FireWire.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX

Digital CD cable, joystick/MIDI bracket, Creative application suite, Feature showcase CD, DVD-Audio sampler disc, *Soldier Of Fortune II*, *Hitman 2* and SoundFont sample banks.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Exceptionally detailed game audio
- ✓ Good DVD playback
- ✗ Not the all-conquering all-rounder you think
- ✗ Music reproduction only average

88

A peach, but not the ultimate listening experience

REVOLUTION 7.1

■ £88 | Manufacturer: M-Audio | Phone: 0871 717 7100 | www.maudio.co.uk

The exceptional sound card you've probably never heard of

M-AUDIO is a familiar brand for musicians and recording professionals, but most gamers won't recognise either the name or the products. In a market dominated



by Creative, it's an uphill struggle to get noticed unless you're doing something cheaper or better than a Sound Blaster. Take note, for the Revolution does both.

The diminutive 7.1 card breezes through every listening test, offering astonishing clarity in every genre with stereo or 5.1 speakers. TruSurround XT dramatises the headphones experience, and Circle Surround II adds such depth and precision to DVD movies that it's almost educational. EAX gaming is on a par with the Audigy 2, and although a lack of hardware support for DirectSound is widely lamented, at Athlon or Pentium 4 speeds it's not obvious.

Although the Revolution 7.1 isn't as gamer-friendly as the Audigy 2, the fidelity it breathes into every sonic byte is intoxicating. MP3 files caress the hairs on the back of your neck, DVD soundtracks wash over you, raising your eyebrows to subtleties that previously went unnoticed, and game effects are punched by bass that's tighter than a cat's arse. Your pupils will contract and your heart will race whenever you squeeze the trigger. TruSurround XT is a godsend for those of you with headphones, and Circle Surround II is a major advancement for 3D sound

in general. Its SRS Dialog Clarity feature works a treat, and once you've used it, you'll find yourself straining to enjoy rival technologies. Even the drivers are top notch, the control panel adopting the look and feel of Windows and being more intuitive to use than anything else here. It'll be interesting to see how Audigy hits back.

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS
4x stereo mini jack out, 1x stereo mini jack line in, 1x mono powered microphone input and 1x RCA digital output.



INTERNAL CONNECTIONS
None.

BUZZWORDS
EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Sensaura, Circle Surround II, DirectSound, A3D, Dolby Digital 5.1, Dolby Pro Logic, DTS.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3, MixMan Studio, VJ Lite, WinDVD 4 Dolby Digital EX Edition, Audio sampler CD, Ableton Live demo, Reason demo, plus samples and loops.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Unrivalled fidelity across the board
- ✓ Elaboration of games, films and music
- ✗ No hardware DirectSound
- ✗ Lack of joystick/MIDI port

92

Vive la Revolution

FINAL THOUGHTS

I'd approached this test knowing that the Audigy 2 would win. Anyone into PC hardware will have heard the consummate Creative card at one time or another, and will have been impressed at its tidal wave of premium quality, meticulous audio. For the gamer it has everything, from connections and compatibility through to kudos of the Audigy badge. But it doesn't win this test. When you're spending £100 on a card, it's the sound that counts. You want to be assured that you're upping your experience of music, movies, and above all, games. And it's here that the Revolution is more than just a mere whisker ahead of its rivals.

While it lacks a joystick connection, the consensus is that everyone is switching to USB, so that's no great shame. And while it doesn't offer hardware DirectSound, you really won't notice it – your video card is the most likely candidate for performance bottlenecking. What the Revolution offers is the most amazing sound across the board, from music and films, CDs, MP3 and games. Its unique Circle Surround II technology is a major experience enhancer, and headphones reproduction knocks every other card in this test for six.

By comparison, the TerraTec cards were solid and great sounding, but ultimately disappointing. The 5.1 Fun offers a lot for the money, but its poor showing in key music genres makes the 5.1 Sound Blaster a slightly safer and cheaper bet. The bigger 7.1 Space is better overall, but the way it rebooted when faced with *Battlefield 1942*, and the way it hammered speakers when the machine was powered off, means it trails both the Audigy 2 and the Revolution as a serious choice. **PC**

SOUNDSTORM 5.1

■ Price: N/A | Manufacturer: NVIDIA | Phone: 0118 903 3000 | www.nvidia.com

The video card people make sound cards too? Well, sort of

THE COMPANY

that coined the phrase GPU also makes an APU. No, not the guy who runs the Kwik-E-Mart store, but an Audio Processing Unit – an integral part of its nForce chipset and the XBox.

To test NVIDIA's SoundStorm we borrowed a K7N2 Delta-ILSR from MSI, a motherboard built around the nForce2 Ultra 400, and an Athlon chip as the one from the Wandy store room refused to work. The first test was music and movies, and though the assembled panel was keen to try out its DICE features, where sound is encoded to Dolby Digital 5.1 on the fly, the test was analogue and the quality

was lacking. However, gaming with Sensaura was superb, the setup working especially well over headphones.

The SoundStorm is proof that you don't need a sound card – all you need is a motherboard with the chrome NVIDIA logo on it (be warned, though, that not all nForce products feature SoundStorm). Everyone who heard the APU had previous experience of onboard systems and was understandably sceptical, but the expansive 3D sound in games won them over. Despite lacking support for the most current version of EAX, its gaming performance remains on a par with the best in this test

– only the slightly narrow fidelity of music counting against it.

EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS

3x stereo mini jack out. On separate bracket: 1x optical SPDIF, 1x SPDIF and 2x stereo mini jack out.

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS
N/A.

BUZZWORDS
EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Sensaura, DirectSound and a DSP-based Dolby Digital Content Encoder.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX
N/A.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Top notch gaming audio
- ✓ Easy to use and solid drivers
- ✗ You need the right motherboard
- ✗ Unmemorable unless you go digital

83

Just what the gamer ordered. For free



DEAR WANDY

This month, our in-house quack looks at rattling fans, missing codecs and some dodgy mathematics. Nurse, the tranquiliser please!

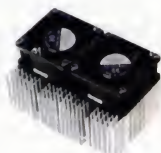
■ RICH TEA BISCUIT: Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.



Global Win's VOS32 cooler, a reliable way of chilling your old slot type processor.

WHIRRING TIMES

Q Sometimes when I power up my PC, I get this strange whirring noise from inside the tower. I've checked in my BIOS, and the only thing I've noticed is that my CPU fan speed drops from a constant 4890 to a random number between 4615 and 4582. This doesn't always happen, and occasionally I can be on my computer for hours and nothing will happen. Is this what is making the additional noise and, if so, does it mean it's on the way out? What's the best way of making sure I get the right replacement in terms of wattage?

daveyboy

A A nasty rattle or a grinding noise the moment you power up your machine is almost certainly a cooling fan in its death throes. It could be the one in your power supply, but it's more likely the fan over your processor – you try sitting in a sauna for three hours solid and see what kind of noise you make. You know, I don't actually recall the air pump in a PSU ever failing on me, but I've had plenty of beleaguered CPU fans yell in pain over the years. Recently I've come to rely on Zalman products and have no hesitation in recommending them to anyone looking for a quiet, reliable cooling solution. The fan that came with my three-litre P4 processor simply wasn't capable of sucking out the heat, and I've heard a surprising number of people say the same thing – but since installing a Zalman Flower and ensuring that the case was a clear foot and a half from the

wall I've not heard the temperature alarm once. Alas, I'm sure that Zalman only makes P4 and Athlon coolers, so if you have an older processor you'll need to shop around for something that will do the job. The slot-type Intel processors – the ones that look like Nintendo cartridges – require SECC2 fans with three-pin 'smart' plugs and four securing pins. The problem here is that demand for these odd-looking slabs is tailing off, and supply with it. Fear not, for some are still available: see www.globalwin.com.tw for information on their VOS32 cooler product, which will do you just nicely.



As David Andrews has discovered, Microsoft is no longer bundling the Indeo codec with XP.

INDEDUMPS

Q I've been religiously playing *Mafia* on my old computer since it was released, and have never had any problems. The grief started, however, when I bought a new computer – a 3GHz Pentium with Windows XP. I reinstalled *Mafia* and clicked on the icon but now it claims that I need an Indeo Codec to run the game. I have no idea what the hell this is and why I now need it. Do I need to buy it, or can I get it as a free download? I can't play it until this is sorted out and I'm going mad!

David Andrews

A Codec is short for 'compression decompression', and is to audio and video what RAR or ZIP is to the files on your hard drive. It's a mathematical way of deflating the size of data by removing its redundant parts so more can be packed into a smaller space, and of inflating

it again afterwards. The Indeo Codec was developed by Intel in collaboration with Microsoft as the core of their Video for Windows technology – put simply, it's one of the most common ways of compressing and decompressing multimedia files and has been a part of the Windows platform since, oh, way back. The fact it's missing on your system tells me that you bought your PC very recently indeed. Why? Well for reasons unknown, Microsoft stopped distributing Indeo from Windows XP SP1 onwards, and so anyone using a brand new copy of XP with Service Pack 1 and then trying to play a game that requires the codec will be sure to receive an error message stating it's missing. The only way around this problem is to download and install Indeo manually. Have a look at moviecodec.com/download/codecs.shtml, or visit indeo.ligos.com for the enhanced bells-on \$14.95 commercial version.

RAM OUT FOR THE LADS

Q How can I find out what model motherboard I have? It doesn't say in any of the documents I've got, and it's probably worth knowing, for RAM ceilings and stuff. Can I find out without losing the shell of the computer, or do I need to delve into the mass of wires and

stuff to find it written on miniscule letters in the darkest corner of my beige case?

Ed Carmichael

A I'd encourage you to visit www.sissoftware.co.uk and download the latest version of Sandra. No, this isn't some animated desktop girlfriend who bounces her dumplings, rubs herself against the Recycle bin, and tells you how turned on she is every 90 seconds, it's a trusted information and diagnostic tool that produces reports in plain English on all the stuff inside your computer. In effect, Sandra has a grope around inside your PC's boxers and reports back with a giggle or a gasp. It has the worst name of any software product I know – coming from Essex, I've become accustomed to the word being shrieked at high volume in local bars ("Oi! Sandra!! The c***s are all outta f*****g Breezers!!!!") and wince slightly whenever I have to refer to it – but please, don't let stereotypes dissuade you. The free version is all you need, but if you want to lend your support by buying it, it's less than £30.

XBOX BORE

Q I'm trying at the moment to pipe my Xbox through my monitor with a TV card. I've come so close and there's sound but there's no picture! I have an Athlon XP 2200+ running



Gearbox was showing off its stunning PC version of *Halo* at this year's E3, meaning there is now no reason to buy an Xbox.

"A grinding noise the moment you power up your machine is almost certainly a cooling fan in its death throes"

"I am very confused by AMD's Athlon chips and the whole 'megahertz myth'"

Windows 2000 Professional with a GeForce Ti4200, if that makes any difference. I've had a check on the Hauppauge site at www.hauppauge.co.uk and have found that the black screen with no sound is a common problem, but I've tried everything that's listed. Please help, I'm so close to running *Halo* on a monitor!

Anon

A The problem you're up against is that a TV signal is very different to a video card signal. As you've found out, you need a bunch of circuits designed to convert between the two formats. But in the same way that I know nothing about flower arranging, I know nothing about the Xbox and so can only guess at the answers to your problem. The first thing I'd do is connect another source such as a DVD player and make sure that your Hauppauge hardware is actually working. The second thing I'd do is make sure your console is producing a signal that your TV card is expecting, so try opening the Xbox Dashboard rather than diving straight into *Halo* – the latter may be pumping out a HDTV signal. If all else fails, buy one of the many VGA boxes available for the console that take advantage of its high resolution (ie 480 progressive rather than interlaced) output. The TV card route should work, but you're going to be trading a lot of quality for even more blurriness. A decent VGA box should produce a progressive signal rather than one that has merely been line-doubled – keep an eye out for 480p in the technical specifications, as this will look just peachy on a big monitor. And while you're doing that, we'll play *Doom III*.

MEGABOLLOCKS

Q I'm a brand spanking new PC gamer and have just bought a new PC, with an Athlon



With products this ugly, Apple's marketing department needed to do something. Even today, it still can't play *Half-Life*.

2500+XP, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce FX 5900 Ultra (it's beautiful!). While I'm quickly learning about all aspects of PCs, I am very confused by AMD's Athlon chips and the whole 'megahertz myth'. Why does my processor only run at 1.866MHz, and why don't megahertz matter, according to AMD? Game boxes say that the particular game needs a certain speed of processor to run effectively, which is always quoted as being in MHz. So what does AMD mean?

Anon

A It was Apple Computer's marketing department that popularised the term 'megahertz myth' in an attempt to show consumers that a processor's clock speed isn't a direct link to its power. There's truth in the argument that a seriously fast processor doesn't necessarily mean seriously fast applications – in the case of AMD, its processor is capable of dealing with more instructions per cycle (IPC) than a Pentium 4, and so for example a 1.2GHz Athlon will benchmark the same as a 1.7GHz Pentium. The recent XP badging madness tries to equate the performance of AMD's chip with the Intel equivalent, an Athlon XP 2500+ thus being another way of

saying '2.5 Pentium-like Ghz'. Given people's mad obsession with numbers – folk do make buying decisions based around hertz – it's easy to see why AMD does it. Trouble is, the true grunt of a processor is a combination of IPC and clock speed, and it's in the latter category that the Pentium 4 is stretching a good lead. Sure, it has a lower IPC than an Athlon, but it revs high enough to more than make up for the difference. Additionally, AMD has been getting increasingly hopeful with its numbering, as the 3000+ and higher Athlons are simply not able to match the Hyper-Threading, high-clocking power of the Pentiums to which they've been equated.

ALL IN THE MATHS

Q I have NTL 128Kbps broadband Internet, but when I'm downloading I only average 16KB transfer speed, even when downloading from a UK server. Why is this? I see all the lights on my modem-box flashing on and off like crazy. Is this normal or should they be on all the time? How can I get better download speeds without having to upgrade?

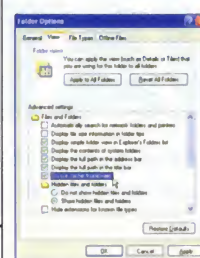
Jimmy Patterson

A Just a quick answer for you, as this was covered in more depth by last month's article on broadband. 128 kilobits (Kb, lowercase 'b') is



To ensure A7N8X dual channel operation, don't pair your RAM sticks in the coloured sockets.

WANDY'S TOP TIPS



Keep finding Thumbs.db files all over your XP hard drive?

ALL FINGERS AND NO THUMBS

Fed up with those Thumbs.db files sitting in every folder on your XP machine? Yeah, me too. You'll be glad to hear there's a very simple way of getting shot of them. Right click on My Computer and choose Explore. On the Tools menu, click Folder Options, then select the View tab. Towards the top of the list, you should find an option called Do Not Cache Thumbnails. Make sure there's a check in the box, and press the OK button. You're done.

QUICK KEY APPS

Fancy giving all your favourite applications shortcut keys? Sure you do. Drop a shortcut to the program on the desktop, then right-click on it and choose Properties. With the Shortcut tab open, highlight the Shortcut key field and type the letter you wish to assign, for example, CTRL+SHIFT+E for Eudora. Hit the OK button. Next time you want to start Eudora, click the Desktop icon in your taskbar (or WINDOWS+M) and hit that key combination.

MULTIPLE RENAME

OK, so this one isn't particularly elegant, but it works. To rename multiple files at once, simply drag-select the files you want, then right-click and select Rename from the menu. If for example you have a whole bunch of digital holiday snaps – DSC01898.JPG, DSC01899.JPG and so on – select them all and rename the first one to 'holiday.jpg'. As if by magic, they are all renamed with consecutive numbers. Brilliant!

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50.

the same as 16 kilobytes (KB, uppercase 'b'), because there are eight bits in a byte. So your 16KB transfer speed's spot on.

SINGLES CLUB

Q I have an ASUS A7N8X Deluxe motherboard with an Athlon 2800XP and 512Mb of DDR400 memory. When I boot up, the 'intro' screen states that I have 512Mb of memory, at 200 MHz, and that the system is running in Single Channel Mode. Shouldn't the memory be running at 400MHz? Also, should it be running in Double Channel Mode? I've tried fiddling with the BIOS settings, but any changes result in the memory running at just 166MHz. Please could you tell me how to adjust the

BIOS to get the correct result? I've tried emailing ASUS, but to no avail.

Woody

A There's no setting for dual channel because the BIOS decides for you. If it's stuck in single channel mode, the likelihood is that your memory configuration is wrong. You either have just one DIMM, or two DIMMs in the wrong hole. First you need to make sure that both sticks are identical twins, and that you have them in sockets 1 and 3, or sockets 2 and 3 (socket 3 being furthest from the processor). The fact ASUS has made sockets 1 and 2 the same colour, rather than identifying the pair required for DDR operation, has confused A7N8X owners the world over. I should warn you, however, that you won't see any huge difference in performance between single and dual channel modes – the speed of your system bus is the determining factor, not the memory bandwidth. But I do understand your feelings about the principal of getting the thing working as it should.

Visit Wandy on the web at www.dearwandy.com



WATCHDOG

Seeing red because of cruddy customer care? Well, either consider anger management or simply drop us a line to vent that fury instead...

■ WRITING THE WRONGS Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC Zone*, Dennis Publishing, 19 Bolsover Street, London W1P 7HJ

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing into complain about a product, please furnish us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

CRACKING UP

Oh dear. We've only gone and opened up a seething can of worms. Last month, you may recall the plight of reader John D'Arcy who had discovered cracks on his *Battlefield 1942* CDs, rendering them unusable. He had tried to get Electronic Arts to replace the discs but was told he would have to pay for the privilege – despite his protestations that he was not responsible for the damage. EA told Watchdog at the time that it couldn't offer any kind of comment on his situation. Ooops, EA, big oops.

We have subsequently received several emails from enraged readers who have experienced similar problems and equally have had no luck getting their CDs replaced: "I too have a cracked CD of *BF1942* – this appeared about eight weeks ago," explains Matt Jennings. "The cracks stem right out into the data section of the CD. Having sent at least two emails to the EA customer support line – and not one response – I'm a little annoyed."

One reader had an even more shattering experience: "My copy developed the same cracks as John D'Arcy's," offers Mark Brooks. "Only my CD 2 went further – it actually exploded in my CD writer! I too contacted EA and was told I would need to pay £7 per disc. I challenged them that the discs must be faulty, but was also told that it was user error."

There are various theories being put forward by some readers as to why this is all happening in the first place. One bright spark believes that such cracks have only started appearing since the swap over to DVD cases: "I think it is something to do with the disc-retaining mechanism of the DVD case that causes the damage," reckons reader Rob Hill.

Others believe that there's actually some kind of conspiracy going on at EA: "I would like to point out that this is not an isolated incident," says Seedubs. "Indeed, if you trawl



Enraged *Battlefield 1942* customers leave base camp to march on EA...

the UK *BF* sites, you will find many a broken *Battlefield* disc moan. This is a long-standing gripe among the *Battlefield* community. It has been suggested that the problem is down to a 'dodgy' batch of Eastern European discs used by EA Games."

We sent off these complaints to EA, hoping that this time they may actually have something to say about the various allegations being made against them. They came back with the following: "We have now fully investigated your query and can confirm that we do not believe that this kind of damage has come about due to any flaws in our discs," states the company. "However, as a gesture of goodwill, Electronic Arts will offer to replace any discs that have cracked or shattered from the inside of the rim, free of charge."

The company adds that these free replacements apply only to discs that it believes were damaged without misuse: "Discs scratched, lost or damaged in any other way will still be charged as per our existing warranty/media replacement policies. And in the event that the same

customer continuously damages their media in this way, we reserve the right to charge the regular fee."

SAVAGED BY SAVASTORE?

So just what are the joys of a new laptop? A whole new pile of problems if you happen to be Neil Vicar-Harris. He bought his Aries pride and joy from Savastore, only to discover that the laptop was developing a bad case of dead pixels.

The machine was duly dispatched back to Savastore at the beginning of June, but Neil's not having any luck getting the darn thing back. It's now the beginning of July and he's been told that it could take another three weeks before the laptop surfaces again: "All I wish is I could request a refund and go shop elsewhere," pines Neil.

Righto, Savastore, this had better be good: "I have looked into this enquiry and from what I can see the laptop was returned to us because of the dead pixel problem. But it turned out it was in fact dirt behind the screen to blame," a spokesperson for the company explained to us. "To rectify this problem, the machine needed to be returned to the base unit

manufacturer. There was then some delay in inspecting it."

Savastore says that you subsequently requested a refund, and the laptop's return to the manufacturer was cancelled. Then, according to Savastore, you decided you wanted to go ahead with the repair after all: "The machine was ready to go back to the manufacturer when Mr Vicar-Harris requested another refund which has now been processed," claims Savastore.

So you should be sorted, Neil. And next time, be sure to make up your mind about what you actually want before dropping us a line...

Is it a dead pixel or simply dust? *PCZ* awaits a response from its printers...

A QUESTION OF ETIQUETTE

Ah, the joys of scribing Watchdog. It's with 'enthusiasm' that we tackle the delights of a 10,000 word dissertation on why a company has treated a particular punter badly. Paul Lofthouse's complaint is one such Tolkien-esque epic. And who could be the object of his anger? Carrera SSC.

According to Paul, it's taken the company several weeks to sort what should have been a

THE ACCUSED

savastore.com

ELECTRONIC ARTS™

MULTIVISION

SCAN

Carrera SSC

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

simple problem with his Carrera PC. While we could spend several months entertaining you with a breakdown of Paul's allegations about the sloppy service supplied by Carrera's agent, Repairline, and the accompanying delays – not to mention the story of Repairline's robust defence – we won't. What we will say though (as an objective third party) is that Repairline does appear not to have been 'firing on all cylinders' with its service.

The ultimate problem here, though, is that Paul committed a fatal mistake – he ended up leaving a very 'arsey' voicemail for one of Repairline's engineers, which caused some bad feeling. While we can fully understand anyone losing their rag with a company, as soon as things get 'personal' and you start laying into an individual employee verbally, you're doing yourself no favours if you're on the hunt for compensation.

So our advice is to keep it polite; keep it formal; and then drop us a line if you're still not getting anywhere...



Carrera SSC stands back as reader Paul Lofthouse makes another phone call...

PC? WOT PC?

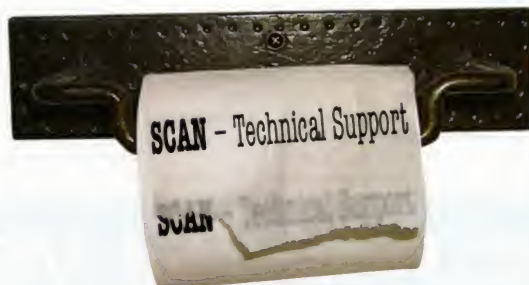
It's always a nightmare when that new PC goes wrong. But for it to go wrong, wrong and then wrong again just adds insult to injury, as Robin Shale found out when he bought a PC from Multivision just under a year ago. "After two days, the power supply blew and I had to send it back," recalls Robin. "After it was returned, it was fine until about eight weeks ago, when it totally crashed again."

Robin spoke to the technical department who said they wanted it sent back: "I pointed out that their warranty stated the first three years was 'on site' and the last three years was return-to-base – but they still wanted it back. Three weeks later, my PC was returned to me. It lasted two days and failed again."

So he spoke to Multivision again and they again insisted that the PC be returned to base – despite his 'on site' warranty. According to Robin, the PC was eventually fixed and, guess what, it went wrong yet a-bloody-gain. And now Multivision wants Robin to send it back. Again.

Over to Multivision who told us that the repairs carried out to your PC could only have been done back at base. They go on to say that you then had a problem with the RAID set up and USB ports. "We discovered that a RAID card had been installed without the appropriate software, which was resolved by sending out the appropriate software and a USB card," say the company. Multivision goes on to admit that it actually sent out the wrong software at first but added: "We are prepared, at Mr Shale's discretion, either to re-send the driver software or to arrange for an engineer to carry out an on-site inspection of the machine."

As a gesture of goodwill, Multivision is also going to be popping some software and a free web cam in the post to you, Robin. By the time you



read this, your PC woes should be sorted. Let us know if they're not.

SCAN-T KNOWLEDGE

Misinformation can be a terrible and, more importantly, pricey thing. Step forward Tom Brown who bought a Chaintech motherboard from Scan. He subsequently decided that he wanted to upgrade his system and splashed out on a more powerful 333MHz processor from Scan. And that's when the problems started.

"On installing this processor, the machine would not boot so I contacted Chaintech's technical support," explains Tom, who was told by the company that his motherboard doesn't support 333MHz processors. The end result?

"Paul committed a fatal mistake – he ended up leaving a very 'arsey' voicemail for one of Repairline's engineers"

Tom is rather unhappy with Scan: "The motherboard doesn't perform to the specification as advertised and stated by Scan's technical support. I would therefore like a replacement or my money back," finishes Tom.

Over to Scan who told us that it already resolved your complaint the day before Watchdog contacted it, and it has agreed to provide a replacement motherboard to go with your fancy processor.

In the meantime, we were told by Scan that Tom was happy with the outcome. Err, not quite actually: "I'm not happy with this situation as now I have no PC and no definitive date for a replacement," fumes Tom. "I'm back to playing the waiting game. Resolved? No. Needless to say, I won't be making any future purchases with this company." [X]

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ IT'S SHOCKING NEWS THIS MONTH AS WATCHDOG RECEIVES TWO – YES TWO – COMPLIMENTS FROM READERS ABOUT GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE...

Excuse us while Watchdog peels itself off the floor after fainting from surprise at the goodwill emanating from PC ZONE readers this month. Two of you have written in to sing the praises of companies who are getting their customer care right.

First up, imagine that you've just bought *Black Hawk Down* at £29.99 from Gameplay, and then the next day you see that they have reduced the price to £14.99. That's £15 up in smoke within 24 hours. And when this happened to Greg Smith, he was none to happy about it.

"So I emailed Gameplay complaining, expecting to get the 'tough luck, it happens' response. You can imagine my amazement when I got their reply," exclaims Greg. Gameplay apologised and stated that it does have last minute reductions but in this case, the company was happy to honour the price of £14.99 and has subsequently refunded the difference.

Another company coming up smelling of roses is Empire Interactive who has made Tony-John Wood's month: "I purchased two of their games and found both not to be working," explains Tony. "I did the usual and contacted their office. I was advised to send the games in or, as I live near their offices, to bring the games back in person and they would be replaced."

So off he popped to Empire's offices and handed over the knackered merchandise. The kind folk there proceeded to replace them on the spot and, for the hassle, also gave him a free game to boot. "I'd just like to say a big thanks to all at Empire," gushes our Tone. "I have never encountered such helpful people and the tech support was brill."

Blimey, Watchdog is starting to feel all faint again...



Black Hawk Down from Gameplay – it's not only the helicopters that come crashing down...

BUYER'S GUIDE

Our new guide to making your hardware buying decisions easier

Gone are the three categories of old, and in their place are three new ones. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you no matter what

you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy second place. Finally, the Also

Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your fancy. If you feel we've got something wrong, or

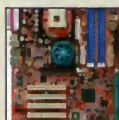
just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we'll be certain to shower you with gifts.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARD



IS7 (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER Abit Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Huge performance coupled with a huge sigh of relief from your wallet. Although the IS7 uses Intel's Springdale chipset, essentially a restricted version of its Canterwood sibling, Abit's motherboard supports P4 800/533/400MHz CPUs with Hyper-Threading, and up to 4GB of Dual DDR. It also features onboard LAN, 6-channel audio, and IEEE 1394 FireWire. Proof you don't need to spend over a ton for a top-rank motherboard.



K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)

STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

Featuring the nForce2 chipset with the FSB wound up from 333MHz to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards such as the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.

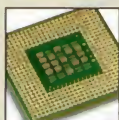


875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £150
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo features some truly remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open applications – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, 6 channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and overall packaging are excellent.

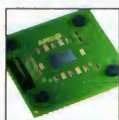
PROCESSOR



P4 3.0GHZ

STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

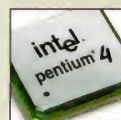
For an additional £160, you could order the three-litre chip's big brother, the 3.2GHz, but we don't think the extra thrust justifies the price hike. With Hyper-Threading enabled, the 3.0GHz Pentium delivers a jaw-pounding power hit from twin processors and an 800MHz front-side bus. With a decent motherboard and some fast memory, products such as this make *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2* seem all the more plausible.



ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON

STREET PRICE £190
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

Let's not forget who drove Intel into rolling out key features such as Hyper-Threading. AMD's Athlon successfully shocked its Santa Clara rival into releasing technologies that were originally pencilled for the next Pentium. And although any 3.0GHz HT on paper makes the Barton look like a distant runner up, it remains a great chip at a great price. Paired with a decent video card, it's a high-quality solution.



P4 2.4GHZ

STREET PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.com

Editor's Choice motherboard and a Hyper-Threading Pentium 4 chip running at 2.4GHz with 800MHz FSB. Drop in our favourite Radeon 9800 Pro video card, and instantly you have a balls-on-machine that's ready and willing to tackle the next generation of gaming. If you're building a local games network and want big machines for small money, look no further.

HDD



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

Many of you will view a 120Gb HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8Mb cache and a speed of 7200RPM.



DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £69
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is a drive for everyone: it's large, fast, and not that expensive. Most users will find 80Gb more than adequate for their work, play, and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but if you want the Serial ATA version, expect a £20 premium.



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £117
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM, Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

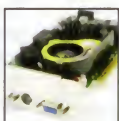
GRAPHICS CARD



128MB RADEON 9800 PRO

STREET PRICE £270
MANUFACTURER Crucial
TELEPHONE 0800 013 0330
WEBSITE www.crucial.com/UK

Being put in the shade by an FX 5900 Ultra doesn't make the 9800 Pro any less of a nutcase. With 128MB of quad-channel DDR memory, a 380MHz core clock, full DirectX9 compliance and AGP8X, the 128MB Raddy usurps every rival bar the baddest NVIDIA card. And Crucial's kit is shockingly good value. Anyone wishing to turbocharge their gaming need look no further.



3D BLASTER FX5900 ULTRA

STREET PRICE £399
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

How could we not praise the world's craziest video card? The 256MB 5900 Ultra is hugely wide, eerily quiet, and unbelievably, hauntingly smooth at big resolutions. If you want your games to ooze an hydraulic efficiency, and have some serious dosh to throw at it, look no further. NVIDIA's high revving, low noise NV35 is everything the 5800 Ultra should have been. The one downside is the price.

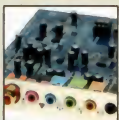


EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO

STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER HiTech
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk

Our Best Budget buy for some months now, the Excaltibur from ATI partner HiTech is plenty card for little cash. At less than £85, you get a 64MB, 275MHz DDR Radeon that's easily the best value card in its sector – drop one of these diminutive fellows into an old donkey and suddenly a whole raft of hungry titles including *UT 2003* or *Battlefield 1942* become a reality.

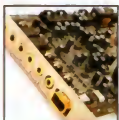
SOUND CARD



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £88
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 717 7100
WEBSITE www.m-audio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.



AUDIGY 2

STREET PRICE £86
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high fidelity, surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

STREET PRICE £160
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Offering the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other card. The external breakout box is a boon for anyone serious about their listening, and includes standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 FireWire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.



World's Most Powerful VGA ever...



Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500

STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't

have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold, and as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. And the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700

STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle not only keeps your desk tidy but also acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse a whole lot more attractive to people who can't be bothered with batteries. It's a touch pricey, and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra.

MICE



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat

on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



OFFICE KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £28
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft

software – their hardware is always of an exceedingly high build quality and, despite problems with early IntelliMouse rodents, extremely durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working, and once you learn the enhanced layout you'll never go back to tapping on anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an

Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and with the help of third-party utilities disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARD



SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2

STREET PRICE £52
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Everyone who uses the Sidewinder ends up loving it. As suggested by its name, the Microsoft stick features force feedback – as well as a rotating handle, an auto-cannon button, throttle lever, and a fully programmable eight-way switch array on the top of the nob. Top notch build and a decent size base make it the choice of virtual pilots everywhere.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £18
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is

renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons, and like the Sidewinder has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle, and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the

flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICK



INSPIRE 5.1 5300

STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The Inspire furnishes you with five satellite

speakers, a sub and a wired remote control. All are sleek looking, solid feeling and great sounding. The bass is clean, the middle and treble crisp, and although power output doesn't climb into three digits, the amp provides more than enough oomph. Added to that, there's support for enhanced 5.1 surround sound on EAX titles. The only downside is that there's no headphone jack.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver

design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but its not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £235
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner,

the Megaworks 550 is a pretty stunning 5.1 setup featuring five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer, and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards the sound quality is superb in both DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of burst power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML175SXW

STREET PRICE £335
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat-panel, fast-paced

gaming, response times really count. And the CML175SXW has the lowest response time in its sector – a mere 12ms, or about half that of most rivals. It also delivers a good, clean image, and is nicely priced. If you're looking to make the move to CRT, and games are a priority for you, this skinny little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



MULTISYNC LCD1760NX

STREET PRICE £380
MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.nec-mitsubishi.com

Amazing build quality, bright and clear image,

radiant colours, height-adjustable stand, low 16ms response time, and all for a very reasonable price. Products like the NEC LCD1760NX sound a death knell for old-fashioned phosphor. Not only do they now come close to matching the visual performance of a CRT screen, they're affordable, elegantly designed, and take up hardly any desk space.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £490
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric

DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE iPod

STREET PRICE £419
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the

market but everybody wants an iPod and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet even bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch as well. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

STREET PRICE £330
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO

STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets

we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYER



FX5600



MSI

MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL



MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ KEEPING IT REAL Dave Woods



DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY

I used to be a narrow-minded, sadistic, jargon-speaking, gore-adoring PC addict, but on the strength of your *Rise Of Nations* review I bought the game and have graduated from mindless twat who wouldn't know diplomacy if it bit me on the arse to conqueror of the world. In my opinion it's the greatest achievement in real-time strategy since *Medieval: Total War*.

Paul Robbins



We reckon *Rise Of Nations* is the strategy game of the year so far. You seem to agree.

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 Platinum has been firmly ensconced in our Buyer's Guide since its release, and is the best gaming card you can currently buy.



Rise Of Nations is quietly building up a massive following. If you haven't tried it out yet, check out the demo, which is part of our Essential Selection on the DVD.

DRIVING ME CRAZY

I upgraded my subscription a few months back to the DVD edition knowing it would be packed full of patches, demos and essential drivers, so you can imagine my disappointment when I checked out the Essential Driver section. As Jim Royle would say, "Essential drivers! My arse."

You've got a great hardware section in the mag and the only drivers on the DVD are for NVIDIA cards. What about drivers for some of the hardware you recommend and maybe drivers for older hardware like the 3DFX cards.

I take your recommendations seriously and always use them when buying new hardware. Even Mr Wand in his debut speech said, "I'm far more likely to be swayed by customer support, drivers and build quality..."

Keith Salter

Have no fear, we've extended our Essential Drivers to accompany most of the hardware we recommend in the mag.

CONFESSIONAL

After reading the letter of the month from issue 131 by Brian Kirwan, I thought I'd write and tell the world about what happened to me at an activity camp in June 2002. I'd promised to email my mum when I got there to let her know I was safe. I went online, but I couldn't connect to Outlook Express. I had to log off my guest account and hack into the Admin account, and use my mother's BT Openworld account. I sent an email then tried to delete the BT connection I had made. Unfortunately I deleted the other account as well, causing all the computers in the room to crash.

In an attempt to un-crash them I found a little red switch on the back of the server's power supply. I flicked it. Not good. The server made a strange noise, and smoke filled the air. The computers in the room died. The on-site radio stopped broadcasting. It turned out I had changed the voltage from UK to US. In the confusion I ran. I am glad to get this off my chest, as I have been feeling guilty for more than a year now.

Matthew Topping

My son, say 6,000 'Hail PC ZONEs' and you will be absolved.

OUT OF ORDER

I've just read your article on broadband and am having similar problems myself. I live next door to the local exchange but when I applied for it online I was told that I was out of range. I phoned BT who said they would check my line again, but was told again I was still out of range. I asked how this could be, as I lived next door to the exchange, but was told the line goes "the other way from my house and back to the exchange". Have you ever heard of this before because it's vexing me greatly.

Allan Waterhouse

Let's just say that nothing surprises us with BT. Leave it a few days and try again – you might get a different person and a different response. Alternatively you could try running an extension lead out of your window and into the exchange next door.

LOVE-IN

I just wanted to say that, as a long-term reader of your magazine (eight years+) and most recently a subscriber, I'm extremely happy to see Mr Cursor gracing the back pages again, so much so that I felt compelled to write to you for the first time and let you know how I felt.



In my opinion the magazine has gone from strength to strength in the past year, and you're also managing to make a magazine that's by far and away the best PC magazine out there, even better. Please, please, please keep up the good work and don't ever change!

Lee Grocott

Aw, shucks. I'm blushing.

HUMOUR BYPASS

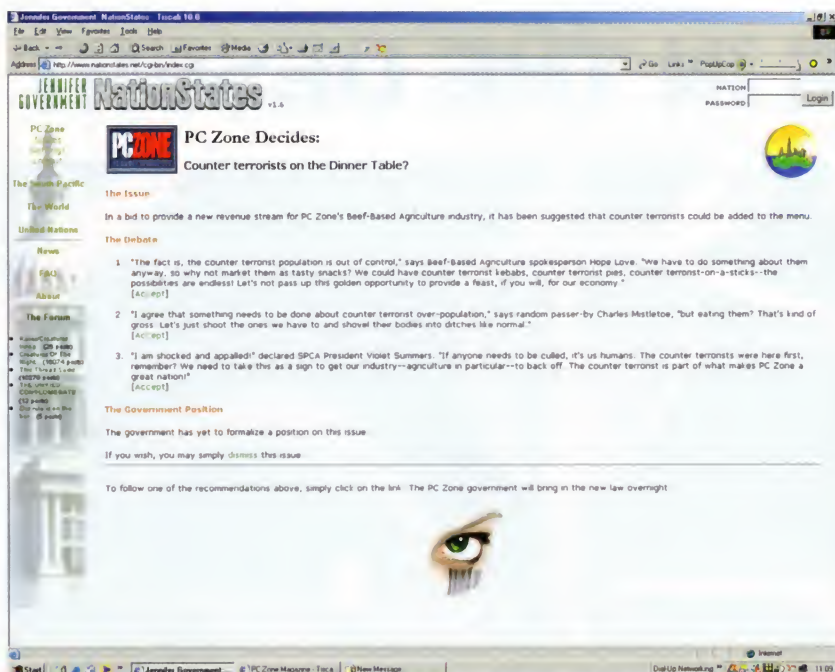
I write to you to lament the death of humour in computer games. It doesn't seem long ago that I was playing gems like *Monkey Island*, *Star Control 2* and *Sam & Max*, which provided laughs a-plenty. And I'm not talking the kind of laughs you get in *GTA 3* or *Half Life*, where you're forced to snigger at the gruesome deaths of helpless innocents, I'm talking about witty dialogue, humorous repartee and guffaw worthy one-liners. I remember plenty of laugh-out-loud moments in games of the past, but nowadays the whole industry seems reduced to a more 'physical' style of humour.



Star Control 2: Back in the days when games were funny.

"The server made a strange noise, and smoke filled the air. The computers in the room died. The on-site radio stopped broadcasting"

ANOTHER SCHOOL BOY ERROR: THIS MONTH, **MATTHEW TOPPING**



The counter-terrorist should be hunted down and eaten. Join up at www.nationstates.net.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

AMERICA ONLINE

After reading a couple of articles recently I've had to write in about American online game developers. At the present time *Shadowbane* is only available in the USA and Asia. You need a valid billing address in the USA or Asia, and I haven't found any company willing to ship the game outside of these territories. So what good is the damn review?

Now after years of waiting, *Star Wars Galaxies* is out, but guess what? It's only available in the bloody USA! I also read that the game has no set release date for the UK! Are developers intentionally trying to ire the UK gaming public? Or do they just feel we don't have a market for it over here?

It all seems to be going a bit Pete Tong, unless they're just using the USA as a trial run of the game before releasing it to the rest of the world (which I hope is the situation!).

Steve Mousley

You can get games on import, you just need to shop around on the Internet to find companies willing to ship overseas, but you won't be eligible for technical support. Anyway, judging by the review of *Star Wars: Galaxies*, you're better off waiting for the official UK release, leaving the yanks to beta test it for you in the meantime.



Almost every online launch suffers from early teething problems, so waiting for an official UK release isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't the industry have more money than ever to spend on finding script writers and the like who should be able to make with the funnies?

JoeyG

There might be plenty of sick things to laugh at in *GTA 3* and *Vice City* but are you telling me that you didn't find the talk radio stations hilarious? I take your point about humour in games in general but in my opinion the scripts in the *GTA* games are the funniest bits of satire in the history of gaming.

ZONENATION

I recently read your review of 'NationStates' in the new Online Zone and decided to give it a go. I created the nation of PC ZONE, which can be viewed here: www.nationstates.net/cgi-bin/index.cgi?target=display_nation/nation=pc_zone

As you can see the national animal is the counter-terrorist and the currency is the Korda.

Cheers for letting us know about the game and I think your new Online Zone is great!

Matthew

Our resident vegetarian, Jamie 'Nut Burger' Sefton is appalled at the thought of chowing down on a counter-terrorist. The great jessie.

BACKCHAT

▲ THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PCZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

The ZONE forum lifted itself above the gutter for a few moments this month with a debate about whether gaming helps you develop in the real world. VoodooGod was the interested party, claiming that "Counter-Strike has given me the ability to recognise certain weapons in real life, and thanks to *Rise Of Nations* I have a better understanding of countries in the medieval period." Jason_6780 can apparently now "shoot someone in the head without thinking using a M4 from *Counter-Strike*." We've passed his details on to the police.

BarryMuff isn't convinced about the educational aspect of *Counter-Strike*: "CS isn't realistic because you've got a health bar. Try something like *Rogue Spear*, *Ghost Recon* or *Raven Shield*, where one bullet can kill you instantly - that's much more realistic. These games have taught me how to enter a room safely, and other cool tricks they'd probably only teach you in the SAS or Delta Force. Also, by chatting online in games I learnt how to touch type. I didn't realise I could until I found myself chatting away looking at the screen not the keyboard." Settling the debate once and for all, DarthMorbus admitted to doing his dissertation on *Half-Life*, which "helped me pass my degree so I guess I can say that gaming has helped my education".

New boy, Will Porter, also stirred things up this month with a thread innocently titled "Nothing Of Particular Importance." DeadMartyr took up the gauntlet by asking whether Keith Pullin is actually Grant Nicholas from Feeder but then rocked the world's very foundations by asking "who is the best gamer on the PC ZONE team?" Porter retorted with a highly regrettable and completely fabricated response. "Who is the best PCZ gamer? Well.... I'm going to have to be diplomatic here, mainly as I don't particularly want my arse kicked... but I'd say that in *Counter-Strike/Enemy Territory* shooting-style games, Korda and our art editor Phil are pretty mean." Pretty mean? If by that you mean that camping, shooting the ground/sky instead of the enemy and offering up a compass to your opponents because you can't even select the right weapon while simultaneously shouting "why won't they die I'm shooting them in the face?" then you're spot-on. We can only assume it's bitterness from being continuously whipped by Holden and Woods in the aforementioned games.

Porter followed up with even more lies: "I'm not the best at anything. But I'm only little so that's OK". Porter, you're the best tea-boy we've ever had - milky with two sugars please.



DOUBLE TROUBLE

I bought your last issue, as I was impressed by the fact that you were offering 'twice as much content as any other games mag' on your DVD. However when I got it back and stuck it in my machine I couldn't find any of the demos you were advertising, just some old games and old patches, and am severely miffed at being 'ripped off'. Can you explain the situation or am I going to have to take it further?

Steve Watkins

The reason why we're able to offer double the content of anyone else is that we've switched over to double-sided DVDs, hence the two labels on

the disc. We mention this in the disc pages but, if pressed, we might grudgingly admit that we should have made it clearer. Take your disc out, turn it over and put it back in. Your missing demos should make an appearance.

Don't miss out - the Zone DVD is now double-sided...



DISC PAGES

WORDS Paul Presley, Dave Woods and Will Porter

DISCS Mark Eveleigh

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC Zone DVD is now double-sided which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC Zone disc browser and turn the disc over.

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711 482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk **BEFORE YOU DIAL...** If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ You need at least a PIII 600MHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 2MX 32Mb graphics card and 128Mb RAM (256Mb recommended for Windows XP users) to run the software on these discs.

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

■ Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

A TALE IN THE DESERT

CD1/DVD Pub: eGenesis Dev: eGenesis Reviewed: Issue 133 (85%)



Egyptian fireworks, who needs history?

It's not often that you get a game that's unlike anything you've ever seen before, but *A Tale in The Desert* is truly unique – check out our review on page 104 for the full skinny. It's a MMOG set in ancient Egypt, and to help you decide whether it's your cup of tea, we've managed to secure a whole 24-hours free subscription for each and every one of you. If you like it, you'll have to pay up to keep playing.

Once you've installed and registered a character (male or female, with fully customisable looks) you'll be transported into the world. If you haven't a clue about what to do next, don't worry because other people will be watching you. Games

Good old Snakebite. Illegal alcohol across the ages.

Masters, and those seeking mentees to tutor, carefully watch the flow of new immigrants, so don't be surprised if you get messaged straight away by someone offering to help. Use the /chat command to talk to other players. If you've created a deeply ugly and unpopular character that nobody wants to know, check out the short walkthrough below to help you with your first steps.



A game where artistic merit is better than brute strength.

REQUIRES INTERNET CONNECTION
24HR SUBSCRIPTION PROVIDED

WALKTHROUGH →

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN...



1 Your first task is to become a fully-fledged citizen. Don't worry, it's not so hard, you just need to make a few bricks. First of all, locate the School of Architecture on your map (F3), marked SArch. Here you'll learn the vital skills...



2 Next you need to collect basic resources. You'll find slate (orange icon) and mud (green icon) near rivers, and sand from sandy areas. Pick grass with the grass icon and drop it in small bundles to dry and form straw.



3 Use a couple of your slates to make a stone blade (from the special menu). This will take you a couple of attempts. Collect a few more bits of slate and click on Projects to make a wood plane.



4 Use wood on the wood plane to fashion it into boards. With the boards you can make brick racks, which need straw, mud and sand to make bricks on. That's it, you're now a fully-fledged Egyptian citizen!

MIDNIGHT CLUB 2

CD2/DVD Pub: Rockstar Games **Dev:** Rockstar San Diego **Reviewed:** Issue 133, 77%

When you get a racing game from Rockstar, creators of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, you know you're in for something a little off the beaten track. Put simply, this is fast, intense and resolutely illegal street racing, with an entire LA map, three vehicles to bomb around in, and four different game modes to experiment with.

Whether you're chasing checkpoints in Career mode, capturing the flag with the Battle option, or simply driving off every ramp you can find, *Midnight Club 2* delivers a feeling of speed that rivals the best of the genre. If you don't find yourself whooping with delight while you're on the Cohete motorbike and burning it down the motorway into oncoming traffic, then ZONE deems you either a cad, a liar or a fan of turn-based strategy. Only you know the truth.



Illegal racing could be right up your alley.

GEARS FOR FEARS

HANDY HINTS FOR MIDNIGHT RACERS

- If you're racing circuits then you'll be given one nitro-boost on each lap. If you stockpile them, your final lap can be pretty impressive.
- When you hunt around the LA map you'll find that there are quite a few buildings you can drive through.
- If you find a building site, poke around a bit as there are some jumps in there to launch you onto the freeway.
- There's a huge flood channel running through the city that provides for all sorts of motorised hi-jinks.
- For cheap thrills, drive your vehicle into petrol pumps and admire the carnage.

NO MAN'S LAND

CD2/DVD Pub: CDV **Dev:** Related Designs

Let's face it: history is boring, and American history is even boring-er. Then again, back in the mists of time it wasn't all Second Amendments and Newt Gingrich, it was much more: Pirates! Gold! Cowboys! Death of indigenous populations! This RTS sets you up as various powers during different stages of

the conquest of America, two missions of which are offered in this demo.

In the first you control Spanish settlers fighting against Francis Drake and his English pirates, while the second sees American rebels fighting against the British Redcoat forces. (Either way, the Brits get a bit of

a dicking). The demo drops you in at the deep end, with very little in the way of tutorial or guidance, but plays out in a fashion that most RTS fans will instantly recognise. So if you've ever clicked on a little fella and told him to go forth and chop wood then you are going to feel right at home here.



Go on Redcoats - kick that mullet-riden fool Gibson's ass.

LIONHEART

CD1/DVD Pub: Avalon **Dev:** Reflexive Entertainment



When magic and history collide.

Lionheart is an RPG that succinctly answers the nagging question: "What would have happened if demons, magic and orcs had turned up in Medieval Europe?" This demo sees your character escaping from Spanish Inquisition-style slavers into a forest that's packed full of goblins and werewolves for you to skewer.

With a comprehensive character selection scene and a friendly demon that possesses you and gives handy tips on spellcasting and inventory etiquette,

Lionheart is an interesting take on the role-playing genre.

There's a few hours of gameplay in here, with some replay value too in trying out the different traits, character classes and spells. Your quest is to flee the forests and find Barcelona, feeding on the soul-energy and magical deposits you find on your way. It's an entertaining jaunt, and any game that contains a 'scimitar of flesh-seeking' certainly gets our vote. Bring forth the spam javelin!

MOVIES

HALF-LIFE 2

CD1 and 2/DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** Valve



Stunning in-game footage ahoy.



Be excited. Be very excited.

Half-Life 2 might have been delayed by a month or two, but Valve is still building up a carefully orchestrated anticipation-building campaign with five brand-new movies culled from the recent E3 demo - yes, the one that literally blew everyone away and left rival developers weeping into their beards.

Now you can see the whole shebang for yourself, with the three initial movies and two exclusive never-been-seen-before slices of in-game footage. Warning - this material has the potential to shake the world to its very foundations.

PLUS PLAYABLE DEMOS OF... GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS, STARTER'S ORDERS, PURE PINBALL, ALIEN FLUX, PONTIFLEX II, STRATEGIC COMMAND: EUROPEAN THEATRE, ARCADROME AND ALL THE LATEST PATCHES

ONLINE ZONE

A strategic flavour to Online Zone this month as we bring you the best in *Age Of Mythology* maps, utilities and campaigns, along with the best of the current crop of mods

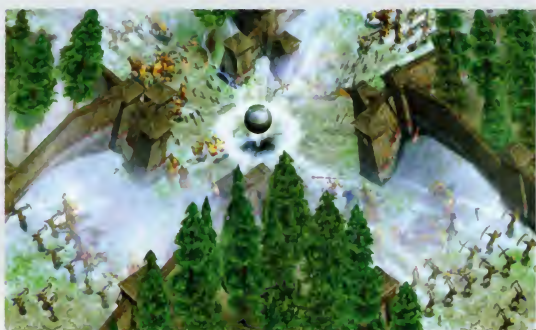
COMMUNITY CHEST: AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

CD1/DVD Pub: Microsoft **Dev:** Ensemble Studios

Reviewed: Issue 123 (90%)

Something of an armchair general? Able to complete history's most complex campaigns with a single click of the mouse? Completed *Age Of Mythology* and wondering where to turn next? Luckily, we've got all the goodies you could ever want this month,

taking *AoM* to whole new heights. Object and map editors, and new campaigns and scenarios – it's all designed to test your prowess. There's even a battle simulation tool to let you refine strategies before you commit your troops to battle. See page 112 for details.



Create new maps and campaigns with our *AoM* mods.

BATTLEFIELD: PIRATES V.11

DVD Dev: The Battlefield: Pirates Team

(www.planetbattlefield.com) **Reviewed:** Issue 133 (61%)

MOD



Well turned-out for a pirate.

Just for a change, we're going to advocate piracy here in *PC ZONE*. No, not ripping off penniless software houses, copying discs and trading them in the back of the school bus and grassing up your mates to

FAST for a £50 reward. We're talking The Jolly Roger, cutlasses at dawn and sailing ships on a dead man's chest (or something). This *Battlefield 1942* mod is a complete oddity and a right laugh. Bootylicious.

JUNGLE WARFARE – GUERRILLA OPERATIONS

DVD Dev: The Jungle Warfare Team (www.junglewarfare.jolt.co.uk)

Reviewed: Issue 133 (75%)

MOD

Unreal Tournament 2003 mods don't really come much bloodier than this. *Jungle Warfare* ramps up the gore level, makes it all team and class based, and transplants the action into more realistic urban and jungle settings. No

actual gorillas, but you can't have everything. We've got a full review in *Online Zone* this month, and it comes highly recommended for anyone looking for a blast of intense combat action.



DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON *PC ZONE*'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 115. FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE BACK OF THE BOX

DVD VIDEO

Whack the disc in your DVD player (make sure you've got it the right way up), brew yourself a cuppa and sit back and watch the hottest games on your TV set

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Those of you waiting anxiously for news on how and when you will be tormenting ogres in *World Of Warcraft* will be relieved that Blizzard HQ is slowly drip-feeding the populace with screens and info. Most notable is this awesome movie that shows off the new 3D take on the *Warcraft* Universe, and some of the bizarre creatures you will be battling.



Undead Hulk behind you!

MEN OF VALOR



That's what the bridge is for, mate.



That's some bad-ass bush.

This hugely anticipated Vietnam shooter, from the makers *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* no less, gets an airing in this superb DVD taster. We can clearly expect panic, jungle and ambushes with sixties rock tunes subtly lining the carnage. You can expect a full preview in next month's *ZONE*.

PLUS PLAYABLE DEMOS OF... SHANGHAI DRAGON, VIETNAM WAR: HO CHI MINH, X PLANE 7, LASER SQUAD NEMESIS, UPLINK, STAR WRAITH AND ALL THE PATCHES AND MOVIES YOU COULD EVER NEED OR DESIRE

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More

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- Favourites:** instantly locate every server that's playing the map you want.

More

www.pczone.co.uk

THE FIRST CHOICE FOR PC GAMERS

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR

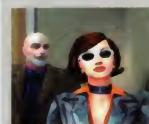


MEDAL OF HONOR

They say the line between films and games is blurring, and after you've clawed your way through the maelstrom of the Omaha beach landings here, you'll have forgotten on which side you're standing. It may not be the best looking shooter around, but for sheer immersion and intensity you can't beat the brilliant level design, the challenging AI, the lavish period detail, and those beautifully scripted set-pieces.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL II

In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.

PUB Atari DEV Legend Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 122



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 110



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all round freshness make *Rise of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games

PCZ ISSUE 129



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail throughout and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

NEW ENTRY This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive DEV Elkir Studios

PCZ ISSUE 132

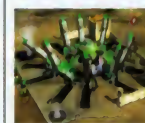


WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 128



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb looking game with well designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific/Westwood

PCZ ISSUE 127



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV DEV GSC GameWorld

PCZ ISSUE 101



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWooD DEV Nival Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 112

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers.

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm

PCZ ISSUE 93

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubi Soft

DEV Ubi Soft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 125



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Bethesda Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 118

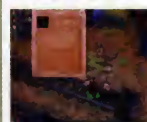


PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio

PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games

PCZ ISSUE 115

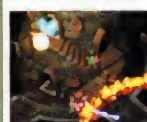


SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios

PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and beady of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



GOthic II

NEW ENTRY If you're willing to dedicate some time to it, this vast RPG is worth your pennies. Its sweeping landscapes are a delight to explore. It takes a while to get going but the incredible level of immersion more than makes up for it.

PUB Atari DEV Piranha Bytes

PCZ ISSUE 132

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 71



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering from Japan. From the lovingly-smeared blood and grime to the terrifying use of ambient sound, it's a class act.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 126

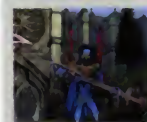


METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tankerloads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakefest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Atari DEV Perfect Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks

PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superbly realistic AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO

PCZ ISSUE 121



ENTER THE MATRIX

NEW ENTRY It may be console-oriented, its graphics may be dated and *Reloaded* could've been better, but it's still *The Matrix* through and through. It features excellent FMVs and great Bullet-Time kung fu moments.

PUB Atari DEV Shiny Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 130

◀ GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE

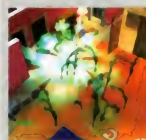


Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.
PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard Civ fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'
PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games
PCZ ISSUE 111



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenille and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team mates in this innovative spook 'em up that's one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.
PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies
PCZ ISSUE 130



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.
PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA
PCZ ISSUE 87



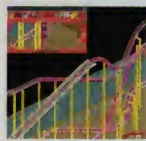
CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.
PUB VU Games DEV Impressions
PCZ ISSUE 70



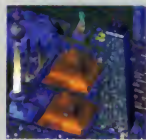
EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.
PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

As utterly absorbing as its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* once again revolves around designing and managing your own theme park. This version also allows you to design individual rides as well as including a handful of real-life coasters. Detailed and addictive.
PUB Atari DEV Chris Sawyer
PCZ ISSUE 123



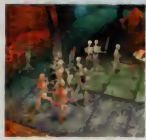
SIMCITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.
PUB EA DEV Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 125



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.
PUB Atari DEV Deep Red
PCZ ISSUE 110



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.
PUB EA DEV Bullfrog
PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ SPACE COMBAT

FREELANCER



The first game in years to actually make an effort to refine the space simulation genre, even if it doesn't manage to radically re-shape it. *Freelancer* combines the epic open-endedness of the classic *Elite* world with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if somewhat short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a thoroughly engaging and very atmospheric experience.
PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil
PCZ ISSUE 128



X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.
PUB THQ DEV Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 82



TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion, and we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.
PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions
PCZ ISSUE 93



Freespace 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. With an epic story and amazing graphics, it suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.
PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc
PCZ ISSUE 84



EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

This title is likely to appeal more to the die-hard space simmers, but *Edge of Chaos* still goes some way towards advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing, freeform gameplay are inspirational.
PUB Atari DEV Particle Systems
PCZ ISSUE 104

◀ ONLINE RPGS

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power* provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

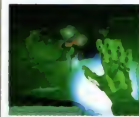


EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races, and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130



NEOCRON

It's a much smaller world than the epic *EverQuest*, but there's a lot crammed into this *Matrix* meets *Blade Runner*-style MMORPG. The atmosphere is fresh, exciting and extremely engrossing. We see big things ahead for *Neocron*.

PUB CDV DEV Reaktor

PCZ ISSUE 124



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMORPG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114



ASHERON'S CALL II

One of the smoothest, most graphically lush MMORPGs around, *ACII* is also extremely easy to pick up. It's still in need of work but hopefully Turbine will be providing the community with regular updates.

PUB Microsoft DEV Turbine Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126

FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, plus more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to make a truly exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C: Madox Games **PCZ** ISSUE 128



MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Microsoft

PCZ ISSUE 111



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103



FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Atari **DEV** Microprose

PCZ ISSUE 72



B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Atari **DEV** Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA III* was an incredible crim-sim, so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved upon, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



COLIN MCRÆ 3

Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari **DEV** Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119



TOCA RACE DRIVER

A storyline mode and one of the most realistic damage models we've ever seen are just some of the added knobs on this TOCA game. The huge selection of tracks and cars available makes for a superb driving experience.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 128

3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

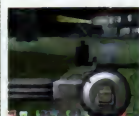


RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Ubi Soft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

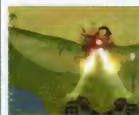


HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios

PCZ ISSUE 95

SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4



A major revamp for the legendary football management series that sees the introduction of a new top-down match engine, which lets you watch how your players are performing – and it works like a dream.

Championship Manager 4 is as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was, and the only real downside is the reduced transfer market activity, which is thanks to the financial crisis currently gripping football.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 128



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114

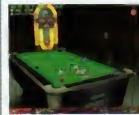


TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98



VIRTUAL POOL 3

Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you clearing up in no time.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Celeris

PCZ ISSUE 99



FIFA 2003

This latest offering in the *FIFA* series seems to have been influenced by *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. *FIFA 2003*'s immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC.

PUB Electronic Arts **DEV** EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 122



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

SYNDICATE

Gauss Gun: selected. Persuadertron: selected. New agent Keith Pullin: recruited. New directive: run amok in an orgy of guns, drugs, explosions and heady nostalgia...

GAME *Syndicate*

DEVELOPER Bullfrog

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts

RELEASED 1993

INFLUENCED *Syndicate* was one of the first games that allowed you to control a squad in real-time, and built the foundations for a lot of real-time squad-based strategy games we see today. It also led the way in multiplayer gaming and was one of the first games with an expansion pack that featured new levels specifically for multiplayer. The ultraviolent, living, breathing city also prompts some to suggest that if there was no *Syndicate*, there would have been no *GTA* – and that's something we don't even want to contemplate...

YOU DIDN'T have to play *Syndicate* for long before you realised it was no ordinary game. Here was a game with a dangerous edge at a time when the industry was going through one of its 'console' stages. *Syndicate*'s blend of ultraviolent action mixed with cunning team-based strategy in a living, isometric 3D future was a billion worlds away from the proliferation of cutesy 2D platform games that plagued the Super Nintendo and the Sega Megadrive.

Syndicate had balls of steel: a techno nightmare where all-powerful corporations ruled an angry urban populace and fought for chunks of the planet. You controlled four faceless agents on an adrenalin-

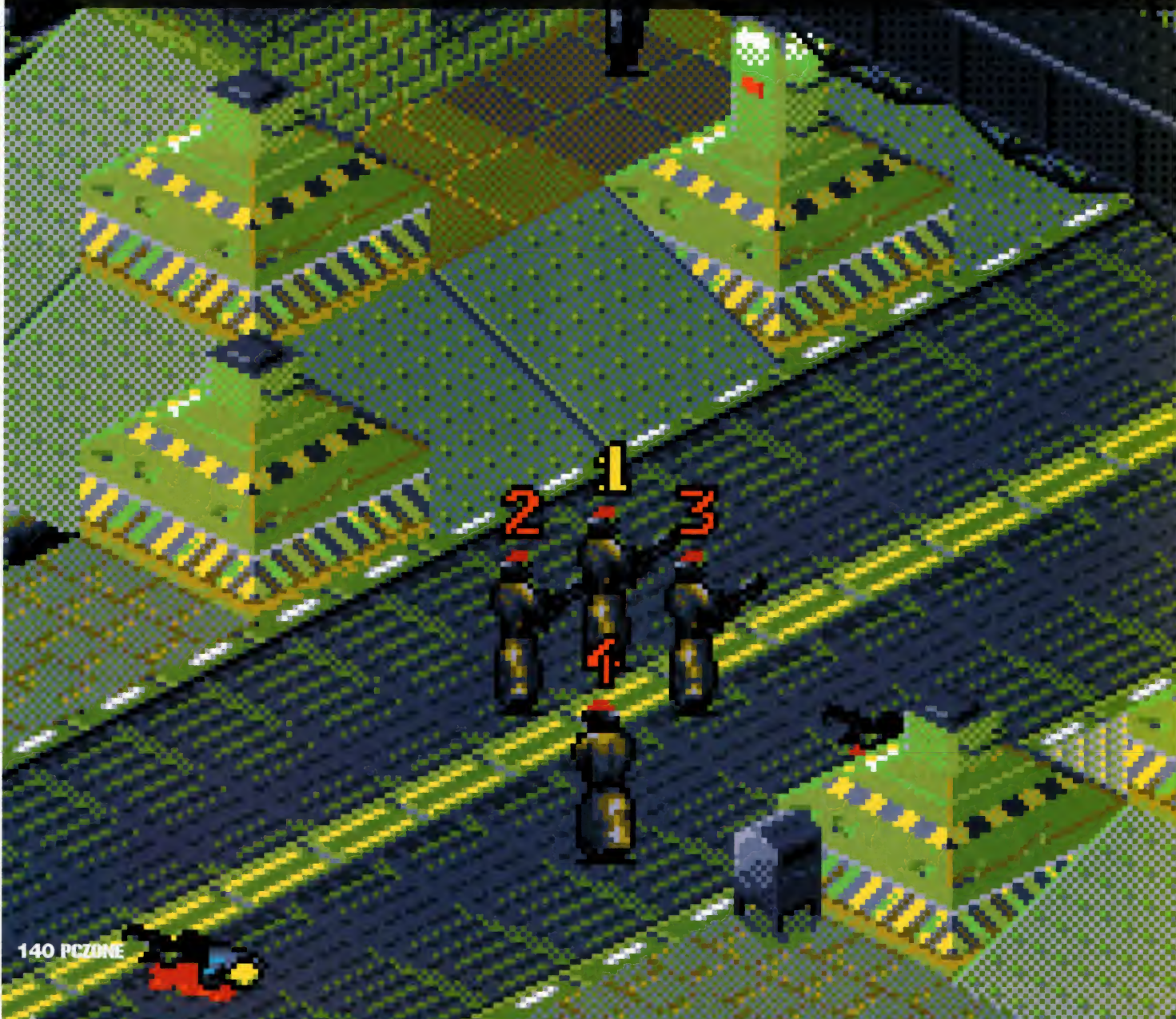
fuelled rampage through level after burning level of industrial cityscapes. Flamethrowers, Uzis and rocket launchers were your corporate tools, although occasionally you could persuade someone to join your company using your trusty 'persuadertron'. Generally though, you just went postal.

The cyberpunk influence was obvious. Genetically enhanced cyber-agents, upgradeable body parts, high-tech weapons R&D, corporate governments – the themes are all-too common now, but at the time there was nothing similar out there. Games like *Monkey Island 2*, *Dune 2* and ultimately *Doom* were the office games of choice, but they bore

no real resemblance to what was being forged in downtown Guildford.

As Russell Shaw, *Syndicate*'s sound designer, recalls: "The whole William Gibson thing played its part along with films like *Terminator*, *Predator* etc. I remember the team wanting the minigun to sound exactly like the minigun in *Predator* and there was a heavy bias towards making the music 'John Carpentersque'."

In the end though, it was something far simpler that led to the final idea: good old-fashioned beer and pizza. Sean Cooper, designer and programmer of *Syndicate* fondly recalls those Stella and mozzarella-fuelled creative enzymes...



"Peter Molyneux, Les Edgar, Alex Trowers, Glenn Corpes, Gary Carr and I were at the pub (1991). We had finished the *Promised Lands* expansion disk for *Populous*, and *Powermonger* was well on the way. I was thinking about what I could be doing next, and had always wanted to do a real-time strategy game (I'd always liked the squad-based tactics of *Laser Squad*). So a team-based (eight-men) game in a city was mentioned. We debated and eventually decided that's exactly what we we're going to do."

Fellow designer Alex Trowers recalls that it wasn't long before they cobbled together something resembling lunatics with guns.

FAST FOOD FRENZY

"After several trips to the pub and Pizza Hut we had a rudimentary engine and the ability to move the blue boxes around. Pretty soon the blue boxes were firing blue boxes at the other blue boxes causing them to turn into blue boxes and die. This was generally considered to be fun, especially when blue boxes hid in alleyways and ambushed the others."

Another Bullfrog excited about the whole idea was a designer by the name

of Peter Molyneux. "Originally we called the game Blue and Orange Bloke (BOB). The original concept was the idea of this person running around a living city (an ambition we had always had). We had lots of brainstorming sessions and came up with the idea that you could power up this bloke into a group of blokes with the use of three different drugs and play them as a team."

In keeping with this 'living, breathing world' philosophy of the other Bullfrog titles, the team decided to model cities with all the inhabitants going about their everyday business.

"Another key thing was the player's ability to interact with those people who he saw fit," explains Alex. "Granted, normally this would just involve killing them but we gave the player the 'choice' (and a fearsome arsenal...)."

Eventually, after months of testing BOB on the Bullfrog office network using multiplayer code from *Populous*, *Syndicate*'s gameplay emerged. Ultimately, virtually every design feature that made it into the finished product came about by playing the multiplayer game, often until way into the wee small hours,

PROFILE

We tracked down the four key creative minds behind the masterpiece that is *Syndicate*. You might have heard of one of them before...



NAME Sean Cooper

ROLE ON SYNDICATE Project lead, lead programmer and designer

CV Sean's illustrious career began back in 1989 when he was just 17, and he now has more than ten major projects under his belt including *Magic Carpet*, *Hi Octane* and *Dungeon Keeper*.

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Populous*

WHERE IS HE NOW? He's game director at EA (who absorbed Bullfrog some years ago), working on new game ideas for the giant publisher/developer.



NAME Alex Trowers

ROLE ON SYNDICATE Designer

CV Like most of the team, *Syndicate* was Alex's first proper game. Since those heady days he's struck gold with numerous Bullfrog classics such as *Theme Park* and *Dungeon Keeper*.

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Syndicate*

WHERE IS HE NOW? Alex now works for Lost Toys, currently finishing off *Battle Engine Aquila* for PC, or in his words: "bending people to my iron will."



NAME Peter Molyneux

ROLE ON SYNDICATE Designer

CV Peter's exploits are well documented: *Populous*, *Powermonger*, *Theme Park*, *Black & White* - it's a fairly respectable list of achievements. These days the Godfather of gaming is just happy spinning around in his chair at Lionhead's Guildford HQ honing his Wayne Sleep impersonations.

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Populous*

WHERE IS HE NOW? Working on *The Movies* and overseeing things at Lionhead.



NAME Russel Shaw

ROLE ON SYNDICATE Sound designer

CV After *Syndicate*, Russell worked on pretty much every Bullfrog game, then followed Peter to Lionhead when Bullfrog was swallowed whole by the EA machine.

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Syndicate*

WHERE IS HE NOW? He is now head of sound and music at Lionhead Studios, working on *Fable* among other games.



The gob-smacking introduction sequence still stands up today.

“People would literally queue to test the game on the multiplayer network”

SEAN COOPER
PROJECT LEAD

You could even get in vehicles like cars and trains. Amazing.

and somebody saying “Wouldn’t it be cool if...”

The ‘drug’ related aspect of the gameplay was of course one of these ‘cool’ thoughts. By injecting your augmented agents (who in fact were ‘marketing directors’ for the corporation you worked for) with brightly coloured liquids, they would become more effective killers; yet, this was never a deliberate plan to cause controversy.

FLYING HIGH

“I was young (20), naïve and didn’t even think about the consequences of drugs in games,” reminisces Sean. “The game was really fun to play and we just kept adding new fun things to the experience. We got stuck trying to devise how to explain High Adrenalin, High Perception and Higher Intelligence – and came down to technology or drugs? Technology was geeky and drugs were cool.”

Alex meanwhile, wonders whether they were even drugs at all: “Is adrenalin a drug? I thought it was a hormone... Besides, you could torch entire crowds of people and they would run around on fire, screaming. Now that was cool.”

Apparently, one early version of the game even featured women pushing

prams who could be burnt alive with a flamethrower. All things considered, drugs were pretty tame.

“It’s not as though we were using a drug like heroin either,” confirms Peter. “It’s more like the drugs that are allegedly given to troops going onto the front line.”

Russell agrees, “For me it was more about cybernetics and mind control. I got a great kick from updating limbs and weaponry. In fact, the stringency of certain sales territories meant that we were more worried about leaving blood patches on the ground where agents and civilians had been killed than we were about drug-related problems.” In fairness, the whole way in which *Syndicate* was developed pretty much proves that nothing was ever planned. “The game was entirely made up as we went along,” Alex concedes. “One night, Sean and I decided to replace the Gauss Gun (initially designed as an EMP weapon) with a rocket launcher – instant legendary weapon status. Often the turnaround between someone uttering a ‘wouldn’t it be cool if...’ and a new version appearing on the server with that feature implemented was as little as 15 minutes.”

Sean remembers that because people would literally queue up to test the game

on the multiplayer network, there were actually surprisingly few development problems. “Nothing really held us up, as I was constantly tuning the gameplay with my friends. Every time they said ‘That’s shit’, I’d change the game to get their response to ‘That’s great’.”

ORGANISED CHAOS

Every game has to have its little hitch at some point though, and Peter admits there were occasional differences. “The greatest artistic difference I remember (although I

will concede that Sean Cooper and myself would argue endlessly about which game features should stay, be taken out and be added depending on who had won the last multiplayer match) is that some people wanted an agent to drop his gun when he was killed or injured, which meant the player had to scabble around to pick it up again. I shrieked and screamed like a school girl until I got my way so that agents did not drop their guns.”

Meanwhile Mr Cooper was trashing the office. “Sean has (or had at the time)

THE FUTURE – WHERE TO NEXT?

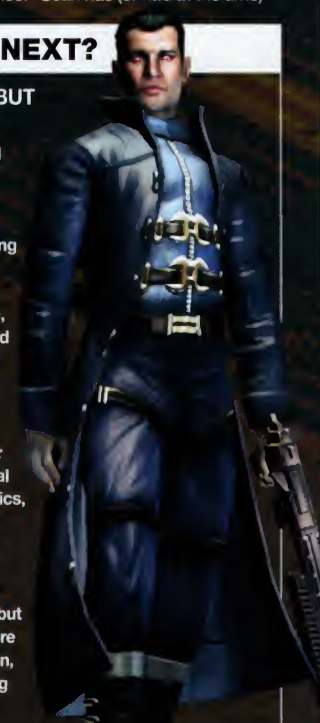
THE LEGACY OF SYNDICATE LIVES ON, BUT WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

In 2003, the 3D isometric tactical action genre is all but dead. A few examples still exist, but mostly in the vein of *X-Com*-inspired turn-based affairs like *Laser Squad Nemesis*, as well as the more puzzle-like *Commandos 3: UFO: Aftermath*, the forthcoming pretender to the *X-Com* crown, is also on the way.

However, none of the current crop of games come close to capturing the true spirit of *Syndicate*, which lies in wanton violence, freedom of action and cool cyberpunk aesthetics. The *GTA* series has the first two, but it’s more focussed on humour and cultural rifting than tactical consideration.

In fact, the only relevant contemporary successor to *Syndicate* is none other than *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Think about it: *DX2* is virtually identical in terms of genre and setting, replete with cybernetics, body upgrades, explosive weapons, mind control, mission variety and loads of freedom of action. The only thing lacking is the squad-based element.

Come to think of it, a first-person *Syndicate*-like game (or squad-based *Deus Ex*) would be brilliant, but with squad-based games seemingly stuck in the mire of realistic military guff, it seems unlikely. Then again, if there are any ambitious modders out there looking for a challenge, consider the gauntlet laid down.



Speedball-style limb upgrades and alternative mission paths – brilliant.

one of the most outrageous tempers I'd ever witnessed," reveals Russell. "I can remember waste paper baskets flying and desks being kicked – all that sort of thing. Remarkably though, everyone knew to give Sean a wide berth if he was in that kind of mood. In an hour or so he would forget that anything had ever happened!"

REVOLTING

Finally, after 18 months, the chaotic beauty of developing *Syndicate* was over. The game was released and went straight to the top of the charts and awards were duly scooped. The story, the original team-based gameplay, the weapons, the multiplayer LAN option, the freedom – it all shone through. The queues of testers had all played their part.

Like most of Bullfrog's hits, *Syndicate* soon spawned an add-on pack – *American Revolt*. This hardcore expansion saw your assassins/marketing department take on the combined corporate forces of North and South America. And it was hard – very hard. One of the opening moments saw you wiped out within seconds if you didn't instantly rally your forces, equip exactly the right weapons and make a highly organised dash for a seemingly impossible point of safety. Despite its popularity, certain members of the team are nevertheless embarrassed by it.

"I'd just like to apologise for the *American Revolt* add-on," reveals Alex. "I was being badgered by Adam at Ultima (the local game shop) about how easy *Syndicate* was. Consequently I might have made the data disk a shade on the hard side..."

Sean on the other hand is none too complimentary about the 1996 sequel, *Syndicate Wars*: "The sequel introduced 3D and blowing up buildings and not really a lot else. It was just the same experience inside it and it hadn't really moved on."

Harsh maybe, but in all fairness *Syndicate Wars* probably wasn't as slick as its predecessor, and the endless blurb before each mission was a bit of a headache.

GRAND CYBERPUNK

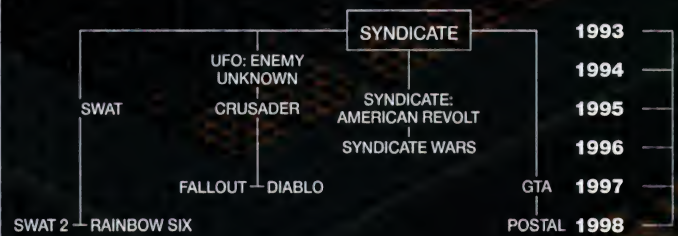
Syndicate eventually found its way onto the Super Nintendo, Jaguar and Megadrive; a strange turn of events when it once stood so proudly aside from them. Still, it proved one thing: *Syndicate* had changed the gaming world.

Look around you today. If a game like *GTA 3* is not a direct descendant in terms of gameplay, it certainly draws inspiration from philosophies such as giving the player a living 3D environment and the freedom to do what he wants. Even more significantly, *Syndicate* was one of the first ever squad-based tactical action games, so it's not hard to draw a line of influence to today's more sophisticated first-person affairs. And then there are games like *Fallout*; open-ended, alternate reality RPG's with a distinct taste for violence. "I think our context-sensitive mouse cursor was probably a first too," adds Alex, almost as an afterthought.

As if to cement its legendary status, Sean, Alex and Russell all agree that *Syndicate* is the most important game they have ever worked on. Only Peter

FAMILY TREE

Syndicate's influence is visible throughout the 3D isometric genre, from the *X-Com* (UFO) series right through to *Diablo*. Its open, freeform nature had a clear impact on the likes of *Grand Theft Auto*, while the seminal use of squad-management and tactics can be felt in more modern tactical action games such as *Rainbow Six*.



disagrees on this, but there's still room for it to sneak in at "third or fourth" on his 'most important' list, which is pretty good considering what's come out of Peter's gaming loins.

For Russell the experience confirmed his love of games. "Working on *Syndicate* made me realise that this was the industry for me. And that Bullfrog was the company for me. Being my first game I had no preconceptions about the industry or the making of games in general. I'm still doing the same now as I was ten years ago and I still feel thankful for being a part of the industry."

CORPORATE FIGHTBACK

So, with the fond memories everyone apparently has for *Syndicate*, maybe we could yet see a continuation of the series?

"I'd love to do another version of it with an updated interface, more weapons, destroyable buildings, multiplayer, improved AI and more eye candy than you can shake a stick at," enthuses Alex.

Even Peter ponders the possibilities. "Originally we had this idea that you could kill puppy dogs – I'd put that back

in now. Although when I think about it there are similarities between *Syndicate* and *BC*, which is being developed for Xbox by Intrepid, one of the Lionhead satellite studios. It's a game set in a simulated prehistoric world and you control a group of humans, so perhaps in one sense we already are revisiting it."

And let's not forget the sound man...

"I could produce a full-quality 'Hollywood' style soundtrack with rich, ambient cityscapes, hundreds of sound samples and as much speech as we need," coos Russell. "That said, who's to say that with film quality sound and music the game wouldn't lose a certain something that the original had? The limitations of the PC platform at the time made *Syndicate* the game it is. People love it for what it is and not for what it could have been."

In any case, with the original team fragmented and indulging themselves in new found loves, a further sequel looks distinctly remote. Then again, there are more than enough trade shows and development seminars for old friends to bump into each other.

Who knows, after a few beers and a pizza anything can happen. [E]



Away she goes! And wait for it...



Dark and twisted, just the way we like 'em.



Policemen running around in flames is not funny. We repeat: not funny.

NEXT MONTH

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JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

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**JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY
APOCALYPTICA**

BATTLE ENGINE AQUILA

BREED

(NEW SINGLE-PLAYER DEMO)

SILENT STORM

CHROME

ALL OF
THIS IN NEXT
MONTH'S
PC ZONE!
YOU CAN'T AFFORD
TO MISS IT!
**ON SALE
18 SEPT**

RETRO ZONE

YOUR REGULAR DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA



The jungle of the future will be occupied by mutant things.



Death Tower, effectively Big Brother with guns.

FLASHBACK

The game that made beige jackets cool

PRINCE OF PERSIA may have reinvented the platform genre with its realistic motion capture techniques and a dash of swordplay, but it wasn't entirely alone. Several years later a little beauty emerged from France that certainly upped the ante. Calling itself *Flashback* and featuring a pistol-toting scientist, Conrad B Hart, it would provide an even stronger link to the action/adventures of today.

The game was created by the now sadly defunct gallic outfit Delphine, producers of *Flashback's* ace older brother *Another World*. Stealing wholesale from cyberpunk sources such as *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*, the plot saw you escaping from prison with a wiped memory, lost in a hostile

futuristic jungle on Titan. Your crime was that you had discovered malevolent aliens masquerading as citizens, and for this knowledge they wanted you dead.

Flashback was beautiful in its day, and you could happily spend hours just rolling around and shooting the greenery while coo-ing at the pretty graphics. The story, meanwhile, was dark as hell and packed with revolutionary RPG elements previously unheard of in the platform genre. In the New Washington levels, for example, you needed money for forged identity papers so you took on jobs from a recruitment agency that saw you delivering packages, guarding scientists and wiping out mutant infestations. Another level saw you competing on a *Running Man* style game show called



"Wake up! You're trapped in a violent cyberpunk nightmare."

Death Tower, fighting your way through a deadly maze under the close scrutiny of countless TV cameras.

Flashback provides a neat stepping-stone between the mindless action of yesteryear and the involving cinematics of today. *Fade To Black*, its 3D sequel, may not have had the same magic touch, but the aftershocks from Conrad's adventures can still be felt throughout modern gaming.



RETRO ZONE

SEPTEMBER 1993

John Wayne Bobbit's penis was the pressing issue of the day, but a 13-year-old Will Porter was too busy playing games to even wince

"The story was dark as hell and packed with revolutionary RPG elements"

THE BEST OF THE REST



JAMES POND 2: ROBOCOD

(Amiga/PC)
It was in 1993 that *James Pond* left the water and bravely fought the creations of Santa's Arctic toyshop. With a stretchy body and little cars to drive about in, *James Pond* gave platform-rival *Zool* a deserved kick up the arse. Worldly PC owners didn't have to pay for it either, as if you put on the invincibility cheat during the demo you could play the whole damn thing for free.



LANDS OF LORE

(PC)
The original *Lands Of Lore* could keep your average bearded geek amused for ages, lost in the quest for the Ruby Of Truth and the Nether Mask – the two ingredients needed to fend off the powers of evil witch Scotia from the improbably named land of Gladstone. *Lands Of Lore* was the first RPG to have decent magic effects and in its day the animations were breathtaking. Looks a bit bobbins now though.



HAUNTING: STARRING POLTERGUY

(Megadrive)
The only obvious forerunner to the sublime *Ghost Master*, *Haunting: Starring Polterguy* saw you jumping in and out of the upholstery in an attempt to scare the Sardini family. Notable for being one of the first games to feature a monster made out of turds, Polterguy's exploits were only marred by the crap sections where you had to collect ecto-energy in the cellar.



ONE STEP BEYOND

(Amiga)
Hot on the heels of *McDonald's Global Gladiators* came Colin Curry in *One Step Beyond*, a game based around the Quavers advertising icon. It was heralded as the sequel to *Pushover*, a puzzle game that strangely had no previous attachment to cheesy potato snacks. Nevertheless, you had to gamely recover Colin's lost Quavers and then, presumably, get brainwashed and buy some in the real world. Didn't work though.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1993

- Smiling Nintendo bosses shake hands with smiling bods at Silicon Graphics who agree to develop Project Reality. Later known as the Ultra 64, and then as the Nintendo 64, they had no idea how much time the world would fritter away playing *GoldenEye* deathmatch.
- Acclaim hypes September 13 as Mortal Monday, releasing *Mortal Kombat* across four different formats. SNES owners moan that all the gore and fatalities have been cut out of their version, everyone else is too busy memorising endless key-combinations to listen or care.
- The Panasonic 3DO system fails to shift more than 150,000 units and is promptly erased from gaming history.
- Ridge Racer* is released in the arcades and there is much rejoicing.

PREVIOUSLY ON MR CURSOR...

Still en-route to Sierra Leone, pau-pau boat captain N'gango explained online gaming to a bemused Mr Cursor. N'gango was particularly vocal about cheating – especially by obnoxious American teenagers. He told Mr Cursor that revenge was going to be exacted soon, hinting that it would be severe in nature.



MR CURSOR

(He's afraid of cheats)

N'gango woke me at five in the morning and told me the ship was continuing onto Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital. He, I and Ch'sai and Desmond (two of the crew) were, however, disembarking early: "There are certain items I wish to keep from the prying eyes of the Freetown customs officials," said N'gango. At this the ship's crane hoisted from the cargo hold the weirdest looking Rigid Inflatable Boat I've ever seen... it was matt black, about nine metres long, and looked like a giant upside-down egg-box.

"The material is Kevlar," said N'gango proudly, slapping me on the shoulder. "To a radar we will resemble nothing more than a wave. The engines are unique also. They are soundproofed, and the drives are muffled impellers for thoroughly effective quietness."

"Thoroughly effective quietness?"

"Yankee submarines"

patrol these coastlines," explained Ch'sai.

Ah!

"Come, my friend," said N'gango. "We must board her now, while we are still favoured by the tides."

LAND NEARLY AHOY

The 'stealth zodiac' was surprisingly roomy inside. Ch'sai piloted while N'gango, Desmond and I sprawled on cushions around a low table, eating strange savoury pancake things. Talk soon got around to online cheating.

"It is the damn Yankee we abhor in the large," said N'gango. "Many nationalities cheat, but it is the attitude with which the Yankee displays himself that so angers us."

"It is the arrogance," said Ch'sai, looking back at us from the helm. "The fathers are bad, yet the sons of the fathers are worse even than this."

"This is the exact case," said Desmond. "The fathers march around the real world taking what they will and making their rules as they go. The sons of these men do the same online. They take with no honour and no skill and yet they are proud."

"Pah! They know of nothing, these Yankee brats," boomed N'gango. "They stuff their imperialist pig-faces with hamburgers, protected in their giant bedrooms, their jelly-wobble fingers on their hi-tech mice, shooting through walls and from great distance. They do not even bother to aim as it is done for them. And then they insult you because they know they are safe."

There was a brief silence as N'gango calmed himself.

"Or at least they think they are safe," he added, slapping his thigh with mirth. All three men burst into laughter.

THE BASIC PLAN

The stealth zodiac was hugging the coastline now, heading south.

We were aiming for the outskirts of a town called Sulima, near the Liberian border.

"We have been working on this project for two whole years now, my friend," said N'gango. "It is the brainchild of my eldest son, Dabola. He is a genius with computers, as are his friends. They have stolen the coding from a highly famous game and they have changed it completely, yet retained everything that made it worth stealing. Then there is our base of operations. We have underground bunkers with many many banks of secure servers. And we have our own generation of electricity, too... supplies in this area are not reliable. It is a lawless place."

He was about to continue, but Ch'sai announced our arrival and told us to brace ourselves. He aimed the zodiac at the beach, rammed the throttles forward, and we shot forwards at speed, lurching up onto the sand and stopping abruptly, three quarters out of the water.

"My friend," said N'gango. "Now you will see for yourself!"

N'GANGO H.Q.

The size of the underground complex was impressive. N'gango's son Dabola (15) was in the process of showing me the game that was ready to go online.

"We have changed much, but have retained the original style of graphics. Do you recognise them?"

"Like I told your dad, I haven't seen a PC game for years. I was stuck on Tristan da Cunha."

"Maybe you have seen the inferior PlayStation version?"

"I only had a typewriter," I said, pathetically.

"Oh," said Dabola.

"Anyway, it was called *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Now it is *Freetown*, with surrounding forest and mountains, and we have taken it online. Also we have changed it to a first-person viewpoint. We are running a tight subscription, targeting only Americans selected by trojans hidden in cheats we have circulated for other games."

Dabola explained what a trojan was, then continued.

"512 people can play at one time. The object of the game is simple: take Freetown, which is controlled by us – 256 of us."

"We have 256 gaming PCs here in the complex, my friend," explained N'gango. Dabola nodded and continued.

"Once *Freetown* is online we will flood the net with cheats and will track those players in-game who annoy and insult us the most. The 20 'winners' will be informed by the game that they have gained entry to a grand play-off, for a massive prize. We will fly them and their guardians here – via Morocco, using money from their own credit cards – and then the real fun will begin."

"Blimey. What are you going to do to them?"

"Many things," said Dabola. "Many things." "Don't you think they'll be too sophisticated to fall for it? I think I'd be a bit suspicious myself."

"Aha! We have conducted a trial run. Follow me." He led me up the stairs and out onto littered shrubland behind the labyrinth. We reached a flattened stony area in which lay a large wooden plank. He lifted the plank, revealing a shallow grave containing a decomposing, badly-mutilated body.

"He cheated at *Counter-Strike*," said Dabola, laughing.

To be continued...

VIRGIN LOVES



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